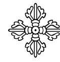
# BYA ROG PROG ZHU, THE RAVEN CREST



## THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF bDE CHEN ’OD GSAL RDO RJE, TREASURE REVEALER OF CONTEMPORARY TIBET

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof. mr. P.F. van der Heijden,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op dinsdag 2 februari 2010
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door

Antonio Terrone

geboren in Verona, Italie
in 1966

Promotiecommissie:

| | |
|---|---|
| Promotor: | Prof. dr. Barend J. ter Haar |
| Copromotor: | Dr. Peter C. Verhagen |
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| | Prof. dr. B.C.A. Walraven |
| | Dr. Andrew M. Fischer (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, NL) |
| | Dr. Robert Mayer (Oxford University, UK) |

*Followers and disciples [of Padmasambhava],*
*These are beings of extraordinary conduct.*
*Sons of the mountains, they chose mist as their clothes*
*and contemplation as their food,*
*To mentally transcend the eight worldly concerns.*

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, *The Clear Mirror of Profound Meaning and Perfect Essence* (1990: f. 11a).

***Ad memoriam***
**Tulku Tsezang Samling Rinpoche (1972-2009)**
**dear friend, invaluable teacher**

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# Acknowledgments

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and stayed at their mountain hermitage. The late mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshog and his closest assistants, bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho, bSod dar rgyas, mKhan po Tshul khrims from bLa rung sgar in gSer rta, and mKhan po a chos rub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan from Ya chen sgar in dKar mdzes, provided instrumental assistance during my frequent sojourns at their encampments.

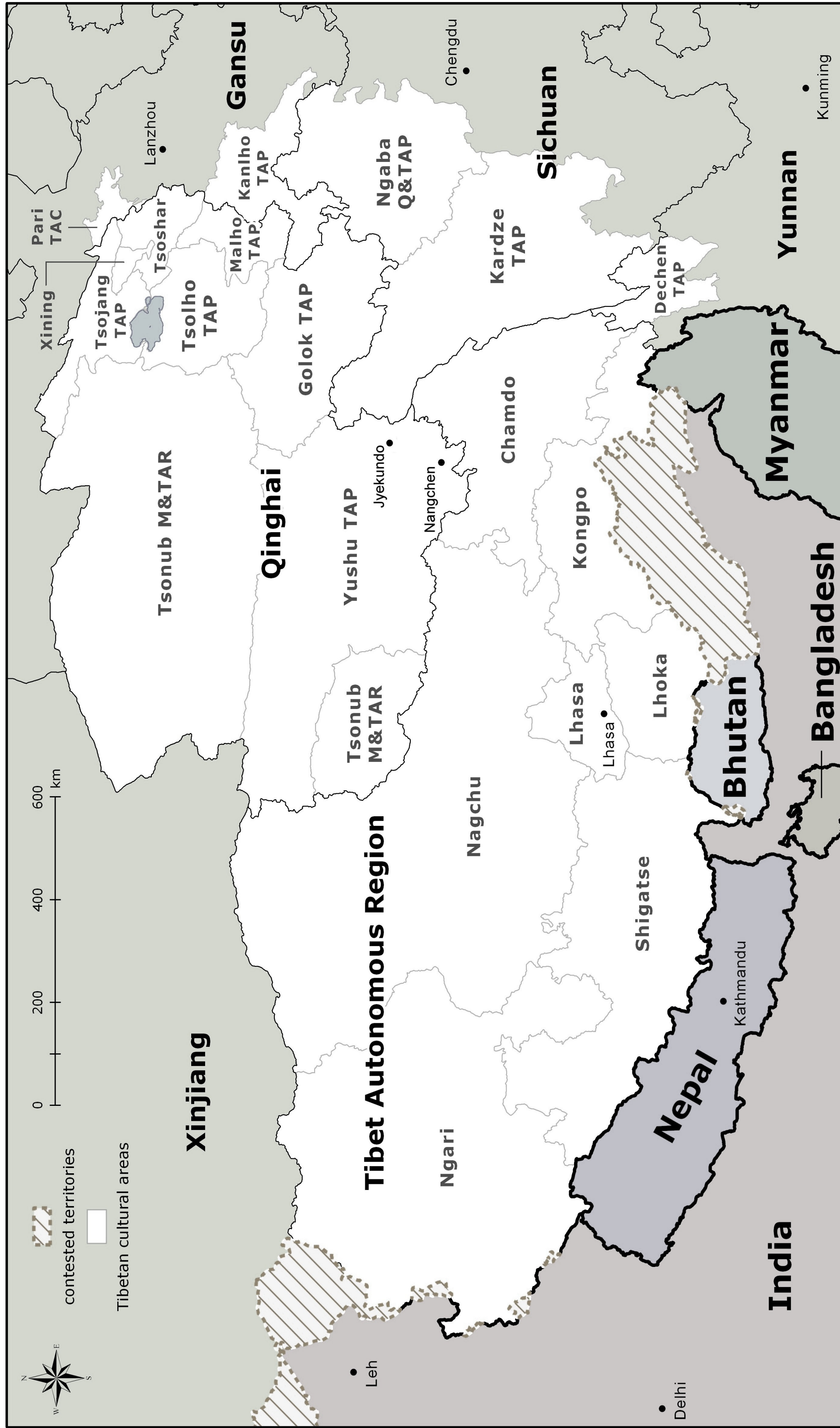
I would like to express my special thanks to Dr. Ramon Prats d'Alos-Moner, my friend, teacher, and mentor, for his continuous support, patience, and attention over the past two decades. During that time, he attentively oversaw my studies as his undergraduate student in Italy and assisted me as a graduate student in Leiden. I am grateful to his availability for conversations and reflections on Tibetan Buddhism. Special thanks go also to Gene Smith for sharing his encyclopedic knowledge with me and for his generous patience in discussing several aspects of the Treasure tradition with me. I also want to thank him for having offered me the possibility to work for one year as "scholar in residence" at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center in New York, a year that proved formative and instrumental for my advancement. Among the friends who helped me in completing this project two deserve special thanks. I want to single out Matthew Pistono to whom I express my most sincere gratitude for the years traveling together across the Himalayas and for the countless conversations that have enriched my insights into Tibetan Buddhism and the Treasure tradition, and for having proofread early versions of this dissertation. However, it is my wife Sarah Jacoby who really helped this manuscript to see the light by proofreading it several times in its final phase and providing invaluable comments and insights. I cannot thank her enough for her vast patience and selfless concern that are second only to her continual encouragement, insightful thoughts, and groundbreaking ideas about this project.

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Lastly, without my mother Maria's support, patience, and sacrifice, not only this project, but my studies and my travels in their entirety would have never been possible. This dissertation is dedicated to her and to the memory of my father Catello Terrone (1930-1990). To them goes my never-ending gratitude and love.

# Map of Tibet




A map of larger Tibet showing Jyekundo (sKye rgu mdo) and Nangchen (Nang chen), two of the main places where this study took place. Map by Quentin Devers for Tibetan and Himalayan Library.



Figure 1: Antonio Terrone with bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje in the latter’s residence at rDza mer chen nunnery, Shar mda’ town. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2007.



Figure 2: bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje offering a blessing with one of his Treasure items, a Hayagrīva ritual dagger (*rta mgrin phur pa*) in his residence at rDza mer chen nunnery. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2005.



Figure 3: bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje reciting a Hayagrīva text at Ru dren nunnery. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2000.

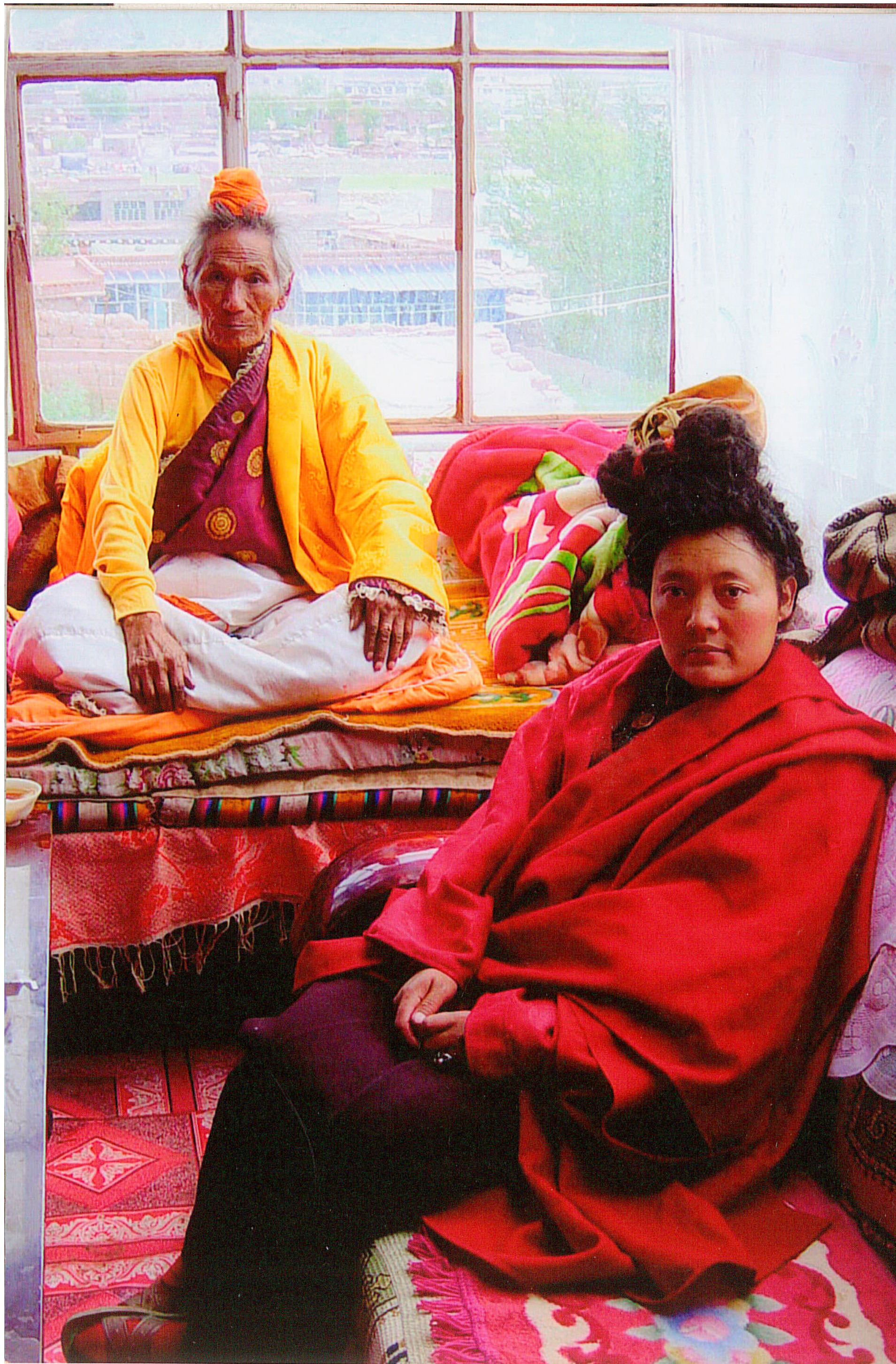


Figure 4: bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and the nun bKra shis mtsho mo, his assistant and scribe, in Shar mda’ town. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2004.



Figure 5: bKra shis rgyal mtshan with dPal chen lha mo and their four children at their residence in Shar mda' town. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2005.



Figure 6: bKra shis rgyal mtshan shows one of his personal material Treasures at his residence in Shar mda' town. Photo: Antonio Terrone 2006.

# Introduction



My first contact with Tibetan Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) took place in Lhasa in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) when I was studying at Tibet University (Tib. Bod ljongs slob grwa chen mo; Ch. Xizang daxue). On a sunny day in July 1997 while cruising on my White Pigeon bicycle exploring the old town and passing by the square in front of the Jokhang temple, my attention was caught by two unusual individuals shopping for meat on the southern section of the square. They were clad in white and red robes, carried massive dreadlocks wrapped around the tops of their heads, and had long *raksha* rosary beads laced across their upper bodies. I felt immediately drawn to the two lamas and after introducing myself I asked them who they were. Despite a few seconds of hesitation due to the fact that, as they later told me, they had never met a foreigner who could speak Tibetan, they were very friendly and soon introduced themselves to me.

bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his brother Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che were two non-celibate Tantric professionals from Khams who arrived on pilgrimage in Lhasa with a small entourage of relatives and devotees. They were disciples of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, whom they said was a great Treasure revealer (*gter ston chen po*) who lived in the highlands of eastern Tibet in a mountain retreat on the slope of Mount gNas chen padma. Freshly graduated from a Tibetan studies program in Italy, my mind was filled with notions of Buddhist philosophy, rNying ma literature, meditative systems, and an eagerness to discover Tibetan religious practices. This fortuitous encounter, which bKra shis rgyal mtshan later described as an auspicious meeting, gave me the opportunity to enter into contact with Tibetan religious professionals in their land.

The following day I was invited to bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his family's residence in gShol gsar pa, an urban area behind the Potala Palace where bKra shis rgyal mtshan explained to me the characteristics of their religious lifestyle. He told me they were non-celibate Tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*) of the meditative system known as *rdzogs chen*, the Great Perfection. They had arrived in Lhasa, regarded as the holiest place in Tibet, a few weeks earlier after an eleven month-long pilgrimage on foot performing full-body length prostrations every three steps along the path. Although a common popular practice of merit acquisition, bKra shis rgyal mtshan

explained that he specifically performed this pilgrimage to purify himself in preparation for the retrieval of a series of religious objects from a sacred place not far from the city. Being able to do this meant that bKra shis rgyal mtshan was a Treasure revealer. Treasure revealers are adepts predominantly associated with the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism and the Bon tradition who can physically retrieve and mentally reveal objects or texts called Treasures (*gter ma*) in accordance with prophecies and visions.

Despite the fact that bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his travel partners predominanantly spoke Khams dialect and at that time I could only communicate in Lhasa dialect, we managed to converse quite well. In the very beginning he also showed some understandable reluctance to open up to me—a newly encountered stranger. However, shortly this barrier collapsed, leaving room for trust and reciprocal curiosity. Thanks to this extraordinary opportunity for me to learn about their religious tradition, I continued asking questions and feeling fascinated by their stories, reports, and anecdotes. I took many notes and photographs, and spent as much time with them as possible. In the following week I met with them regularly, winning their trust and establishing a mutual respect based on sincere interest. The two brothers soon set out to continue their sacred journey to Mount Kailash (Gangs rin po che), and I left for a brief trip to Kathmandu before the university semester began. Before parting, however, they invited me to go and meet them and their teacher at their mountain hermitage in Khams the following year. This meeting marked the beginning of my study of the life and activities of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, the Treasure revelation tradition in present-day eastern Tibet, and the onset of a ten-year-long encounter with Buddhist visionaries.

## *The Study and its Methodology*

I have introduced my dissertation via recounting a personal experience because a significant portion of the information I employ in this work draws on ethnographic materials gathered in the field. At the heart of this dissertation is a study of the life and activities of a Treasure revealer, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. Framed in the larger context of contemporary visionaries and mystics and their role in a Tibetan society strongly influenced by Sino-Tibetan politics, this study addresses the following basic questions: How did Treasure revelation begin and how is it currently maintained? Who are today’s Treasure revealers and why have they enjoyed a

resurgence under Chinese rule? What does the Treasure tradition offer contemporary Tibetans in Tibet? What relationship does Treasure revelation have to politics, both historically and in contemporary Tibet?

In my opinion, two factors have contributed to the flowering of religion outside the monastery in contemporary Tibet. One is the leveling of the general cultural predominance that was once undisputedly held by large monasteries and monastic institutions.[1] I argue that decades of harmful policies applied to Tibet by the Chinese government have undermined the politico-economic and cultural supremacy once held by monasteries. At the same time, some charismatic rNying ma movements have gained in strength by employing multiple elements of Tibetan mythohistorical narratives, local cults and customs, a pervasive and undisputable association with sacred geography, and an opening to diverse and often ecumenical pedagogical approaches. As a result of these phenomena, subaltern forms of revelation and charismatic leadership predominantly claimed by rNying ma adherents have thrived and continue to attract large sections of both monastic and non-celibate members of the population including indigenous Chinese Buddhist devotees.

This research starts from the historical assertion that notwithstanding their claim of increased religious tolerance, the dramatic post-Mao political campaigns have continued to weaken the pervasive force of religious faith, traditional monastery-centered religious power, religious leadership, and education, motivated by the perceived threat of potential subversive anti-government activities. This research maintains that within such a socio-political landscape and the revivalist wave in the cultural and religious sphere, a number of Tibetan rNying ma leaders are advancing charisma-based authority to promote the growth of alternative rNying ma centers of ritual and meditative instruction. In revitalizing this and other forms of traditional religious practices, they are galvanizing some of the most significant forces of today’s Buddhist practice in selected areas of Khams and mGo log of eastern Tibet.

In this dissertation I examine the Treasure revelation movement as it is active in present-day cultural and ethnic regions of Tibet in the PRC. More specifically, I will explore the role of Treasure revealers in the religious world of today’s Tibet. One way this research will accomplish this is by introducing a case study, the life and activities of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje (b. 1921), a well-known Buddhist master and Treasure revealer who currently lives in Shar mda’ in Nang

[1] Goldstein (1998: 23-31).

chen county in the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP). A corpus of Tantric scriptures (probably composed under visionary inspiration by Tibetan Buddhist masters) including texts on *rDzogs chen*, meditation manuals, prayers, and various rituals already existed in tenth-century Tibet.[2] The first Treasure revealer, however, whose works we have access to is the famed twelfth-century mNga' bdag nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1136-1204). Since he and other Treasure revealers appeared in Tibet, the larger phenomenon of Treasure revelations has apparently continued to flourish. In modern Tibet Treasure revealers still possess indisputable reputation and social status in the religious sphere.

As in the past, one of the major strengths behind the Treasure tradition is that its representatives claim to draw on prophecies in Buddhist scriptures which indicate a need to keep their Tantric teachings fresh and powerful but does so by linking them to the eight-century early translation period of Buddhist material from India (*snga 'gyur*) and the activities of the Indian master Padmasambhava. As we shall see in the chapters ahead, within the predominant narrative of the Treasures, Padmasambhava's apocalyptic prophecy of a degenerate age (*snyigs dus*) threatening the very existence of Buddhism in Tibet motivates not only the concealment of Treasures, but also and more importantly their revelation at the appropriate time. Prophecies, astrological practices, divination, and visionary activities allow revealers to attract large followings that defy Chinese authorities' campaigns to degrade and dismiss them as "superstitious" beliefs, but do not make them immune to its crackdown on mass religious movements. The Treasure tradition also depends heavily on meditation for the production of scriptures, the establishment of lineages, and the contribution to a religious-political power and authority. Their meditation technologies relate to various sets of contemplative practices and techniques which will be described in detail below.

## *Sources*

Since 1998 I have spent several months almost yearly in the presence of the Treasure revealers bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, his pupil bKra shis rgyal mtshan, and their entourages in eastern Tibet. Since my early interest in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life and religious activities, I was given

[2] Cf. van Schaik "Early Dzogchen I: The Cuckoo and the Hidden Grain" at http://earlytibet.com/2008/01/08/early-dzogchen-i/

access to the old Buddhist master's personal collection of religious scriptures and Treasure texts. He authorized me not only to write about his life and activities, but also to freely consult and employ his own revelations for the purpose of this academic study. The main textual sources I have used are contained in the *Yang gsang rta mgrin rdo rje me char*, a collection of hundreds of Tantric and ritual texts that represent the bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's career as a mystic.

Beyond his revelations, this research also includes other writings from bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's collected works. For my analysis of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life included in Chapter Four of the present study I have used the autobiography that he authored in 1998, the *Rig 'dzin nus ldan rdo rje'i rnam thar bsdus pa dri med rdo rje'i zlos gar* (The Dance of the Pure Vajra: A Brief Biography of the Awareness-holder Nus ldan rdo rje). In combination with this I have used two minor autobiographical writings, the *bDe chen rdo rje'i rnam thar phran bu* (A Short Biography of bDe chen rdo rje) and the *Pra bha swa badzra'i skyes rabs gsol 'debs bsdus pa tshigs su bcad pa* (A Short Supplication Prayer in Verse to Prabhāsva vajra's Previous Existences). Chapter Five in contrast offers a study of a Tantric initiatory ritual and the production of medicinal pills based on two of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's most representative Treasure texts, the *rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char gyi rtsol med gsang sngags myur lam* (The Effortless Quick Path of the Mantra according to rta mgrin rdo rje mer char) and the *Zab gsang yang tig nyi zla kha sbyor las gab gsal lag len shel dkar me long* (A Crystal Mirror of The Practice of Unveiling the Secret of the Sun and Moon's Profoundly Secret and Quintessential Union).

Other essential sources that I have employed in this study belong to the ethnographic side of the research accomplished during several years of fieldwork in eastern Tibet in present-day PRC regions of Qinghai and Sichuan. These include interviews, conversations, and participant observation with not only bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, bKra shis rgyal mtshan, and members of their communities, but also with many other active Treasure revealers. My encounters with mystics, visionaries, and leaders at their mountain hermitages, residences, and religious encampments have given me the opportunity to contextualize bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life and works in the wider spectrum of visionary activities and Treasure revelation in contemporary Tibet.

My attempt to understand the role of Treasure revealers in twenty-first-century Tibet not only relies on interviews with several Tibetan religious personalities, laypeople, and scholars outside and in various areas of Tibet, but also draws on social theory from the fields of

anthropology, political history, and literary studies in order to provide an examination that is as broad as possible of the phenomenon and the people involved in revelation.

1998 is not only the year I started on the present investigation, but it is also the year that two important works on Treasure revealers appeared, David Germano's article on mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and Janet Gyatso's monographic study of 'Jigs med gling pa's autobiographical writings. Germano's analysis of contemporary Treasure revelation movements was a fundamental departure point for my own investigation and for further expansion of this topic. In his article, Germano elaborates on the role, value, and limits of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's Treasure revelation activities, seeing them as germane to the revival of the traditional Tibetan sense of identity and as a response to the forces of modernity.[3] Drawing on these and other insights my own study looks at a wider spectrum of Treasure revelation proponents in present-day Tibet who provide a variety of sources, activities, and legitimizing strategies. Despite the uncontestable charismatic presence of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and his popularity as a knowledgeable teacher, prolific writer, outstanding Treasure revealer, champion of monastic values, and advocate of lay moral principles, my experience in Tibet in a number of religious encampments and with several other Treasure revealers strongly suggests that many facets of his charismatic personality are more of an exception rather than the rule for contemporary Treasure revealers.

Janet Gyatso's study of 'Jigs med gling pa's autobiographies has shed light on important unstudied dimensions of a Treasure revealer's perception and representation of his "self". She has analyzed in great detail the narrative techniques a Treasure revealer employs to represent himself, the world he belongs to, and the activities he performs. Following Gyatso's approach I have sought to read and analyze bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's autobiographical writings as a source of information about the way he perceives himself, the way he represents his function as a Treasure revealer, and the way in which he became such. Of particular interest in reading these autobiographical writings are the modalities through which he was recognized as a Treasure revealer by others, the role of prophecies and visions in the early phase of his self-perception, and the way he depicts the religious path that culminated in his revelation of Treasures.

As David Germano pointed out in his study on mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, despite the general revival of most spheres of the Tibetan religious world, the rNying ma School in

[3] Germano (1998: 88-94).

particular has scored an especially significant success in the past few decades.[4] Although the socio-political situation in Tibet does not encourage a completely free traditional practice of religion, small mountain hermitages, monasteries, and nunneries have largely fallen under the radar and are still active and populated. This has led to an increased visibility of charismatic personalities, predominantly non-celibate Tantric professionals, who are engaging in doctrinal transmission and visionary technologies such as the revelation and dissemination of Treasures (*gter ma*).

The following anecdotes may illustrate the often surprising ways Treasure revelations are performed in present-day eastern Tibet. On a cool autumn day in the 1980s, mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933-2003) helped by two assistants entered the waters of a mountain lake in Khams up to his waist. After having briefly recited a prayer, he submerged himself completely. After a few seconds, he re-emerged with an object enclosed in his right hand. Immediately covered with a blanket, he handed the object to one of his assistant monks who carefully wrapped the precious item in a white silk scarf.[5] On another occasion, in February 1981, mKhan po 'Jigs med pun tshogs gave a public Mañjuśrī empowerment to a vast audience of Tibetan devotees gathered before him for the occasion. During the ceremony many people noticed the teacher looking up in the sky. After a few minutes an object "resembling a dark green bird egg" fell down from the sky, landing on the hands of mKhan po 'Jigs med pun tshogs.[6]

In September 1986 a small group of Western travelers joined a party of Tibetans accompanying a woman called Khandro Khachi Wangmo, a Treasure revealer of the Bon tradition, who was to make a circumambulation around Mount Bon (Bon ri) in Khams. During the circumambulation of the sacred mountain the Tibetan Treasure finder apparently stopped beside a boulder and struck the rock with a *phur ba* ritual dagger until a cavity was formed. A number of foreigners and other onlookers witnessed the woman retrieve two objects from the cavity in the rocky wall, including a small figurine representing Amitāyus, the Buddha of Long Life, and a nine-pointed *vajra* (*rdo rje*). One of the people present at this event, Mangyal Lhasey Tulku (a reincarnated master), Khandro Khachi Wangmo's brother and apparently he himself a

[4] Germano (1998: 56).
[5] This event has been copied on a VCD (no reference available). I have a copy of the VCD myself, but I don't think the VCD has ever been distributed publicly in Tibetan areas and China. The VCD is shown often in Video restaurants in sKye rgu mdo and some other villages of Khams.
[6] See Germano for a brief description of this account (1998: 81).

Treasure revealer, told the foreigners that the purpose of the revelation of Treasures was to encourage faith in the Dharma.[7]

On November 17, 1998, the Treasure revealer bKra shis rgyal tshan accompanied by his wife dPal chen lha mo and a small entourage of devotees was performing ritual circumambulations around a hill in Khams called gNas chen mkha' 'gro 'bum rdzong, not far from sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP). As they reached a rock that he had previously seen in a visionary experience, bKra shis rgyal tshan had another vision in which a group of "sky-goers" (Skr. *ḍākinīs*; *mkha' 'gro ma*) appeared in front of him and guided him to a huge boulder that was part of a larger rock formation. The *ḍākinīs* apparently instructed him to get closer to the rock and allerted him to be ready to grab a Treasure object that would soon fall from an opening in the rock. A cavity spontaneously opened in the rock emitting a Treasure casket (*gter sgrom*) that dropped in his hands. At the same time, divine nectar (*bdud rtsi*) is also said to have poured down from the same rock opening which bKra shis rgyal mtshan promptly collected in his lower garment, assisted by his wife.

A few days after the retrieval of the Treasure relic, while taking care of the precious nectar collected during the revelation event, bKra shis rgyal mtshan took the casket and as soon as his hands touched the rock chest, it slowly cracked and opened. From the inside of the Treasure chest, bKra shis rgyal mtshan and the others present in the room saw a blazing small luminous sphere followed by a ray of light that was projected towards the middle of the room and then dissolved in the crown of bKra shis rgyal mtshan's head. According to the teacher bKra shis rgyal mtshan, he suddenly received a spiritual text or mind Treasure (*dgongs gter*) in the form of a short string of syllables that in due time he would translate into textual form. More nectar was then collected from the Treasure chest which was later to be employed for medicinal purposes.[8]

On another occasion in 1999, while in solitary meditation retreat in a sacred cave on the mountain cliff just above the Rin mda' rnam par snang mdzad monastery in sKye rgu mdo, bKra shis rgyal mtshan had a vision that showed him a group of *ḍākinīs* pointing to a place below the spot he was sitting. They told him that there was an object buried just under the place where he was sitting. In front of his wife dPal chen lha mo who was next to him, bKra shis rgyal mtshan followed the *ḍākinīs*' instructions and immediately began to dig in the ground with the help of a

[7] Hanna (1990: 10).
[8] gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan's personal communication. gNas chen Padma, August 2000.

piece of rock and a stick. In a few minutes he dug a hole and there he found a long object wrapped in a very old white cloth. As he unwrapped the precious object he saw an old dagger that he believed once belonged to the eighth-century female teacher Ye shes mtsho rgyal.[9]

In 2001, on a warm and sunny August afternoon, the Treasure revealer bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje asked me to help him get up from his bed and accompany him outside. We stepped outdoors where he sat down under the cobalt blue sky. He sat in silence surrounded by a group of nomads who had come to visit him and his disciples. His eyes gazed into the sky in rapture. A small crowd of people sat with him in the sun enjoying the weather. Suddendly, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje addressed one of his pupils ordering him to get pen and paper to write down what he was going to say. In the following hour bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje calmly and rigorously revealed the full text of a mental Treasure that he had just seen transferred to him in a vision.[10]

These are but a small number of anecdotes and stories reporting various types of visionary and mystic experiences associated with the revelations of Treasure items and teachings. Such anecdotes are an inalienable aspect of any Treasure revealer’s career and abound in Treasure revealers’ biographies, autobiographies, and Treasure cycles. Nowadays, in addition to manuscripts, Treasure revelations have found new channels to reach devotees such as VCDs, DVDs, and pamphlets with photos of Treasure items and even websites on the Internet.

Another predominant dimension of Treasure revelation that this study addresses is the role of non-celibate visionaries within the tradition. Despite the particular precepts of their ascetic lifestyle, the male Treasure revealers often support households and families and enjoy a well-defined social role in their communities. However, their religious identity does not derive from their social function only. Rather, it is supported by a complex and strict discipline of asceticism, religious practice, and by the Buddhist values they uphold. A Treasure revealer’s identity is likely not to be restricted to the context of a Treasure site and to the entourage supporting his/her activities. As I argue in this study, a Treasure revealer’s identity is shaped by a multitude of factors including early visionary experiences, support and recognition by influential masters, and the revelations the Treasure revealer discovers.

[9] gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s personal communication. gNas chen Padma, August 2000.
[10] The author witnessed the event, and recorded it on digital tape.

## *Bibliographical Considerations: Western Works of Modern Scholarship*

Visionary revelation in Tibet is an ancient phenomenon which has always been very powerful both culturally and politically. The importance of its products within doctrinal and philosophical traditions such as Bon and rNying ma can be appreciated by the vast collections of revealed scriptures that fill their respective canons. As I maintain in this dissertation, such a phenomenon is still valued in present-day Tibet.[11]

Treasure revelation is a cultural form that clearly builds on previous traditions. Not only does it show influences from such Tibetan traditions as dream interpretation, divination, prophecy, the cult of relics, and visionary practice, but it also capitalizes on Tibetan popular practices such as the cult of sacred geography, pilgrimage, opening of "hidden lands" (*sbas yul*), and the memory of Tibet's glorious imperial past. Additionally, the surrounding cultures of India and China had very similar Treasure revelation traditions.[12] Most of the Treasure revealers are non-celibate Tantric professionals who are, therefore, much more in contact with the ordinary people than their maroon-robed colleagues. Precisely because of their popular reach, they affect a wider variety of audiences in more ways than the less accessible type of "higher" religious institutions have been able to do. One example of this phenomenon that I will introduce in more detail in the chapters ahead is the recent trend of Chinese Buddhist devotees who flock by the hundreds to Tibet to receive teachings, to practice, and often to live at the religious communities of Treasure revealers. Because of its increasing social importance, Treasure revelation is a religious and cultural phenomenon worthy of being studied from sociological, religious, and anthropological points of view.

According to tradition, the origins of the diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet are intimately associated with a series of events which are believed to be related to Padmasambhava and his close disciples. Padmasambhava, an Indian saint who reached Tibet in the eighth century CE on invitation by emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan (740-c.798?), established the first roots of Tantric Buddhism in the land. Among the many deeds attributed to him is the creation of an intricate method of teaching transmission called *gter ma* or Treasures. The term *gter ma* refers to concealment and revelation of spiritual scriptures and sacred artifacts. Among the most

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[11] Germano (1998), Terrone (2002).

[12] See for instance the revelation of sacred texts and ritual caskets in latter Han imperial China discussed in Tsai (2006) and the cult of *nidhi* in Hindu tradition addressed in Goudriaan (1978).

fascinating systems of practice in Tibet, the Treasure tradition is also one of the most controversial.[13]

The school of Tibetan Buddhism that appropriated and developed the Treasure transmission is the rNying ma, traditionally called *snga 'gyur rnying ma*, or "the ancient school of the early translations." According to rNying ma authors, an enormous number of Tantric teachings have been revealed and composed via the Treasure revelation system, and a number of these collections of Treasure cycles, such as those attributed to Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer for instance, have been included within the large rNying ma canon, the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*.[14] This particular form of revelation, although popular in Tibet since the eleventh century, has nevertheless met with difficulties when trying to justify its origins and prove its legitimacy. Much has been written by many scholars on the origins of the Treasure tradition, its history, and the biographies of its major representatives. Of all these topics, it is the question of authorship of the teachings transmitted through Treasure revelation that has been the greatest concern for both Tibetologists and Tibetan Buddhists alike.[15]

Although scriptural revelation in the forms of Treasures (*gter ma*) is a major and lively force within Tibetan Buddhism, scholarly attention to it is a recent phenomenon. Looking back to early discussions in Western scholarship on Treasure revelations and related literature offers an interesting glimpse into the way Treasures and their revealers (*gter ston*) were understood by non-Tibetans. One of the earliest comments on Treasures is to be found in the writings of L. Austine Waddell (1854-1938), a Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army. Waddell was stationed in Darjeeling for many years where he studied Tibetan language and learned about Tibetan Buddhist customs and religious practices. His interests in Tibetan culture led him to write a few books that are inevitably pregnant with Protestant bias and picturesque observations of Tibetans and their religion, which at that time was mostly known as "Lamaism." In his book *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism, with its mystic cults, symbolism and mythology, and in its relation to Indian Buddhism* published in 1895, Waddell gives the earliest derogatory opinion of

[13] See, for instance, Andreas Doctor's recent study of 'Ju mi pham's comments on the Treasure revealers advancing a way to differentiate authentic revealers from charlatans. See Doctor (2005: 31-51).

[14] The Bhutanese edition of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* is believed to include more *gter ma* texts than any other version. I am grateful to Robert Mayer for this information.

[15] See Appendix Four in this volume for my general bibliography of publications on the Tibetan Treasure revelation tradition in non-Tibetan languages. Apart from a few exceptions, the bibliographical information of the works discussed and quoted in this section can be found in the the bibliographical list in Appendix Four. For those refernces not quoted in the topical bibliography please see selected bibliography (Secondary Sources and Critical Editions in Other Languages).

the Treasures or "hidden revelations." About the rNying ma adherents and the Treasures he writes:

> The residue who remained wholly unreformed and weakened by the loss of their best members, were now called *Ñiṅ-ma-pa* or "the old ones," as they adhered to the old practices. And now, to legitimize many of their unorthodox practices which had crept into use, and to admit of further laxity, the Ñiṅ-ma-pa resorted to the fiction of *Ter-ma* or hidden revelations.
> Just as the Indian monk Nāgārjuna in order to secure an orthodox reception for his new creed had alleged that the Mahāyāna doctrine was entirely the composition of Ṣākya Muni, who had written it during his lifetime and entrusted the volumes to the Nāga demigods for preservation until men were sufficiently enlightened to comprehend so abstruse a system, so in the same way several Niṅ-ma (sic) Lāmas now began to discover new gospels, in caves and elsewhere, which they alleged were hidden gospels of the Guru Saint Padma. And these so-called 'revealers,' but really the *composers* of these *Ter-ma* treatises, also alleged as a reason for their ability to discover these hidden gospels, that each of them had been, in a former birth, one or other of the twenty-five disciples of St. Padma.[16]

Waddell's mind was imbued with the typical view of his time that Tibetan Buddhism was not an authentic offspring of Indian Buddhism, but was rather a local creation, a form of shamanism and demonic practices. Waddell's criticism of the rNying ma school was not addressed uniquely to the Treasure scriptures; he also condemned Padmasambhava for "his grotesque charlatanism and uncelibate life."[17] Waddell's comments on the rNying ma and Treasure traditions reflect the contemporary opinion of his time when Tibetan Buddhism was considered by most European scholars to be merely a corrupted form of the true Buddhism, which was Indian Buddhism.[18]

In their attempts to understand the Treasure revelation tradition, early Western scholars of Tibetan religions focused their philological preoccupations on the *bka' thang* literature in hopes of throwing more light on the history of ancient Tibet. The *bka' thang* or "chronicles" are a series of scriptures that narrate the life and deeds of Padmasambhava in Tibet and are believed to have been concealed as Treasures and eventually revealed in various versions by different past Treasure revealers. Although not an academic but rather a magistrate and poet with a passion for the East, Gustave-Charles Toussaint (1869-1938) came in contact with the 1839 Peking Edition of the *Padma bka' thang*, the text that narrates the life and deeds of Padmasambhava that had been discovered as a Treasure by O rgyan gling pa (1323-?) in the fourteenth century. After a period spent in different regions of China, Vietnam, and India and fifteen years of largely autodidactic work, Toussaint published *Le Dict de Padma*, which was a French translation of the

[16] This quotation is from a later edition. Waddell (1971: 56-57).
[17] Waddell (1971: 33).
[18] Lopez (1998: 162).

*Padma bka' thang*.[19] This was the first time non-Tibetan readers had access to the life of Padmasambhava and his mysterious tradition of the "hidden Treasures" (*les trésors secrets*) of Tibet. For many years this would be the only translation of the manuscript until 1978 when Thartang Tulku published an English edition based on the French original, *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*.[20]

Among those who were first "scientifically" interested in the study of indigenous Tibetan literary material including the Treasure texts was Andrei Ivanovich Vostrikov (1904-1937). Originally written in the late 1930s, his work on Tibetan historical literature was first published in Russia posthumously in 1962. Only in 1970, thanks to the English translation of Harish Chandra Gupta, was Vostrikov's book known to a wider audience by the title *Tibetan Historical Literature*. Along the same vein as his predecessors including Waddell, Francke, Lokesh Chandra, and Csoma de Koros, Vostrikov's work elaborates on the bibliographical features of the *gter ma* scriptures but does not hide his skepticism of them as valid historical sources.[21] He analyzes and classifies the main genres of Tibetan historical works and includes the *gter ma* texts in the section "Books from Buried Treasures" in which he describes a number of scriptures including the *bKa' chems ka khol ma*, *Padma bka' thang*, *bKa' thang sde lnga*, *Maṇi bka' 'bum* and the *bKa' thang zangs gling ma*.[22]

The same *historiographical* approach is found in Giuseppe Tucci's (1894-1984) work. In his monumental *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, he often quotes and elaborates on *gter ma* texts by emphasizing above all the content of two of the major "historical" Treasure texts, the *Padma bka' thang* and the *bKa' thang sde lnga*. Moved like most of his contemporary colleagues more by *bibliographical* and *historiographical* interests than religious concerns, Tucci recognizes the values of the two Treasure scriptures for the glimpses they offer into the spirit of the time and their reflections on historical events. He suggests that under the political stress of the thirteenth-century Mongol invasion and rule the emergence of Treasure revelation can be seen as "a sign of the yearning for the restoration of ancient times, a proof of national revival."[23] Tucci was probably the first scholar to capture and elaborate on the spirit of the *gter ma* revelation phenomenon in fourteenth-century Tibet. He saw how the Treasures provided spiritual continuity

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[19] Tarthang (1978: xix-xxi). See also Toussaint (1933), and http://members.aol.com/Lemouellic/touss.htm
[20] Tarthang (1978).
[21] Vostrikov (1970: 28).
[22] Vostrikov (1970: 27-57).
[23] Tucci (1949: 112).

for the rNying ma school after the abrupt downfall of the royal dynasty of Imperial Tibet (sixth to ninth century) during the turbulent decades of this dark era, and he demonstrated how the Treasure revelation tradition provided a means for the rNying ma school to validate their doctrines. However, Tucci too maintained a sober skepticism about the authenticity of the *gter ma* texts, which he believed were not discoveries in the real meaning of the word, but rather "compilations, although often done on ancient documents by persons well versed in the sacred scriptures and in the traditions of the schools."[24] He was convinced that "these gTer ston must be considered, rather than discoverers, the compilers, sometimes actually the authors of the works discussed; thus we see that, once we have established the exact date of the discovery of one of these texts, we have in fact determined the date of their composition."[25]

All these early trends were largely motivated by the historians' impulse to classify and scrutinize Tibetan history and culture through bibliographical investigation and philology in an attempt to prove their particular theories. Much to these scholars' disappointment, the Tibetan textual tradition does not offer the opportunity to understand history in a linear way, let alone the *gter ma* scriptures. This is evident in another early historical work on Tibetan religions that includes descriptions of Treasure texts, Helmut Hofmann's *Die Religionen Tibets; Bon und Lamaismus in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (1956). Hoffmann studied Tibetan in Sikkim and Nepal in the early 1950s, but his text is replete with words and terms of Christian derivation and romantic renderings of the life and magical activities of Padmasambhava, whose doctrines and "syncretic religion" he calls "Padmaism."[26] Drawing on works by Tucci, Evans-Wentz, and Toussaint, Hoffmann takes pains to describe the deeds of Padmasambhava in Tibet and Treasure texts such as the *Bar do thos sgrol* known in the West as the "Tibetan Book of the Dead," discovered in the fourteenth century by Karma gling pa. Hoffmann's work became a reference also for Buddhologists interested in Treasure literature as in the case of Edward Conze. Conze's essay on "Buddhism and Gnosis" briefly introduces the notion of *gter ma* in a wider context of revelation and *gnosis* when he investigates analogies between Mahāyāna and Gnosticism in terms of scriptural authentication.[27]

The Tibetan Diaspora in the early 1960s also marked a new era for Tibetan studies. As hundreds of *bla mas*, monks, and Tibetan scholars left Tibet, a large community of Tibetan

[24] Tucci (1949: 111).
[25] Tucci (1949: 112).
[26] This refers to the English edition. Hoffmann (1961: 50).
[27] Conze (1967: 658-59).

refugees descended into India and later Switzerland carrying with them not only personal items, but also works of art and numerous rare texts and manuscripts. Thanks to the vision, commitment, and efforts of E. Gene Smith, the preservation and diffusion of Tibetan manuscripts gained new momentum. After he joined the Library of Congress New Delhi Field Office, Smith reproduced and published thousands of Tibetan texts and manuscripts from the Tibetan-speaking communities of India, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal between 1968 and 1985, often with scholarly introductions written by him. It was in two of these famed "introductions," specifically the "The Autobiography of a Rnying ma pa Visionary Mkhan po Ngag dbang dpal bzang in the *Ngagyur Nyingmay Sungrab* and his Spiritual Heritage" and "'Jam mgon Kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement" in *Kongtrul's Encyclopedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture* (1970) that Smith provided an erudite history of the rNying ma school. In the latter, he also commented on the *gter ma* tradition and reminded us that "the false prophet is a possibility that plagues any tradition that accepts the principle of continuing revelation with doubt."[28] In his introductions portraying the rNying ma school, Smith explained the historical and doctrinal context that frames the *gter ma* texts and the revealers who produce them. Commenting on the presence of criticisms among rNying ma scholars, Smith wrote:

> Many *gter ma* texts are superb examples of Tibetan literature. It is important to remember, however, that Tibetan Buddhism, especially the form followed by the rNying ma pa, is intended first and foremost to be pragmatic–a putting into practice of the insight realized by all the buddha and bodhisattvas of the past. The explanation for the multiplicity of metaphors and tutelary deities lies in the fact that there must be a practice suited to every sentient being somewhere. Forms or metaphors that were relevant yesterday may lose their efficacy in the changed situation of today. Achieving realization through the practice of a teaching is the ultimate test. Certain discoveries or revelations may have a greater relevance in a given situation and produce especially remarkable results.[29]

Among those Tibetans who moved to India were also a number of scholars who brought with them their life experience and knowledge of the Tibetan world of *gter ma* revelation. Such is the case of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche whom the Italian Professor Luciano Petech, then working for the IsMEO and Professor Tucci, met in India and invited to Rome. Born in sDe dge in 1938, Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche arrived in Italy in 1960 and worked first at the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) in Rome and then in 1962 became the first Professor of Mongolian and later of Tibetan Language and Literature at the Oriental Institute of Napoli

[28] Smith (2001: 240). Gene Smith's "introductions" has been republished in 2001. See Smith (2001).
[29] Smith (2001: 240-41).

University. At that time the Oriental Institute of Napoli University had the largest number of departments of Asian and African studies in Italy and one of the largest in Europe. An expert of the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism, Namkhai Norbu was also a teacher of *rDzogs chen* or the Great Perfection and the *gter ma* tradition to which he had been exposed since his childhood in Khams. He expounded his views on the *rDzogs chen* tradition, his Tibetan teachers (among whom the Treasure revealer Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje), and the *gter ma* tradition in his autobiographical classic *The Crystal and the Way of Light: Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen*, published in 1986.[30] After Namkhai Norbu's arrival in the southern Italian city of Napoli, many students gathered around him since rumors soon spread among the students in the corridors of the "l'Orientale" (as the institute was commonly called) that since Namkhai Norbu was a Buddhist *bla ma*, his compassion forbade him to fail students. His classes were thus packed with students. His early follower and university student was an enthusiastic Spaniard named Ramon Prats. Prats committed to following his "teacher" everywhere listening to his teachings, talks, lectures, and classes. Soon the two established a close teacher-disciple relationship, and Prats absorbed everything he could from Namkhai Norbu, becoming particularly fascinated with *rDzogs chen* and the lives and deeds of Treasure revealers. After a few years working as lecturer, in 1988, Prats obtained a post as associate professor at the Oriental Institute. For the first few years, his classes were given in tandem with those of Namkhai Norbu until the latter retired in 1991. In 1982, Prats published his dissertation *Contributo allo Studio Biografico dei Primi Gter-ston* in which he transcribed, edited, translated, and analyzed a selection of biographical writings (*rnam thar*) of early Treasure revealers based on the list in the famed *gTer ston rgya rtsa'i rnam thar* authored by Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas.[31] Soon Prats also produced a series of articles and publications on various aspects of *rDzogs chen* and *gter ma* studies that became the focus of his research career. His book on the lives of the early Treasure revealers was particularly important because together with Eva M. Dargyay's previously published work *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet* (1979), Prats provided the first Western-language translations of the lives of a number of early revealers and marked the beginning of biographical studies in Tibetan Buddhism.

Anne-Marie Blondeau's studies in the ritual and textual traditions of the rNying ma school including the Treasure tradition have become a landmark in the discipline. As director of

[30] Norbu and Shane (1986).
[31] Prats (1982).

studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (religions tibétaines) in Paris, she often led her "conferences" by reading and translating long passages from various kinds of ritual texts such as cosmological treatises, apotropaic rituals, and Treasure texts while providing her comments and interpretations. Scrutiny of the *Padma bka' thang* and the *bKa' thang sde lnga* has been the focus of her attention until recently and is the topic of some of her widely read publications including "Le Lha-'dre bka'-thang," "Analysis of the Biographies of Padmasambhava according to Tibetan Tradition: Classification of Sources," and "*Les* bKa' thang *et la question du nationalisme tibétain*."[32]

The 1980s and 1990s saw developments shaped by the methods of *history of religion* in which the *gter ma* texts and the auto/biography of Treasure revealers were not only considered for their historical validity, but also, and I believe most importantly, for what they represented in their cultural and religious milieu. Benefiting from the large collection of material compiled by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project[33] of which he was the director from 1988 to 1993, Franz-Karl Ehrhard studied a number of Treasure revealers' manuscripts and analyzed the notion of hidden valleys (*sbas yul*) discussed in them. Noteworthy essays of his include "The Role of 'Treasure Discoverers' and their Writings in the Search for Himalayan Sacred Lands" and "Religious Geography and Literary Traditions: The Foundation of the Monastery Brag-dkar bsam-gling."[34]

Interestingly, few Tibetan scholars seem to have been seriously interested in studying and publishing on the Treasure tradition. This makes us wonder if this is simply a coincidence or if does the lacuna of Tibetan-authored research on the Treasure tradition hide a deeper discomfort? A number of Tibetan scholars of the past such as 'Jig rten mgon po (1143-1217) and Sa skya paṇḍita (1182-1251) have been skeptical of Treasure and their revealers. One recent exception is Tulku Thondup, a rNying ma lama who has published prolifically on the subject of Treasure revelation, in particular his 1986 translation and study of a text explaining the Treasure tradition written by the erudite rNying ma scholar the third rDo Grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma (1865-1926). In this book titled *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*, Tulku Thondup provides the first English-language panorama of

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[32] Blondeau (1971,1980, 2001).

[33] The Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) based in Kathmandu (1970-1999) has preserved and reproduced in microfilm form thousands of Tibetan ancient manuscripts (but also Sanskrit, Nepali, and Newari) including auto/biographical writings and Treasure teachings (*gter chos*) of major revealers. These manuscripts are stored at the National Archives in Kathmandu where are currently available to scholars for consultation.

[34] Ehrhard (1999; 2001).

the Treasures in all their forms. Tulku Thondup's book is interesting not only for his effort to make such an important text available to non-Tibetan readers, but also because it offers a bird's eye view of the *gter ma* tradition including the thorny issues of fake revealers and false Treasures.

Since the appearance of essays touching upon the Treasure tradition and its literature beginning as early as the nineteenth century, one of the main themes has been that of *authenticity*. In 1989, Michael Aris (1946-1999), who was then a lecturer in Asian History at St. John's College in Oxford, published a book titled *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives* concerning two eminent and rather controversial figures of the Tibetan Buddhist world: Padma gling pa (1450-1521) and Tshang dbyangs rgya mtsho, the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706). Despite its erudition and importance in terms of Tibetan auto/biographical studies, the book generated discomfort among many scholars for the message his analysis conveyed to his readers. After having read and studied the autobiographical writing of the famed Treasure revealer and Bhutanese national icon Padma gling pa, this leading academic expert of the then relatively young discipline of Tibetan Studies concluded that Padma gling pa was an impostor. Aris wrote:

> There is a peculiar reluctance on the part of many modern scholars to recognize the entirely fabricated nature of the Tibetan "treasure-texts". It is as if their enthusiasm for things Tibetan and Himalayan has blinded them to an obvious truth. There is no evidence whatsoever to support the claim that any of the "rediscovered" texts of the cult actually date from the period claimed for them. […] Yet some modern scholars go so far as vehemently to insist on the cult's entire dependence on the physical discovery of the texts originally composed in the eighth century, with only the minor proviso that there were a few imposters who jumped on the band wagon. Some writers avoid the issue altogether, presumably for fear of bringing Tibetan Buddhism into disrepute. Others hold that the self-proclaimed discoverers obtained genuine texts in the way they described, but then subjected these to a process of heavy editing. Even two of the foremost and most respected authorities maintain that: 'No imaginative and roguish group of Tibetans sat down to invent all the stuff out of their heads.' But a reading of Pemalingpa's autobiography suggests that this is precisely what did happen.[35]

Despite the undoubtedly rational reasoning that brought Aris to his conclusions about Padma gling pa's life as a Treasure revealer, his comments left a bitter taste in many scholars' mouths. It was not only the conclusion *per se* was disturbing, but also the tone and the nuances of his partisan statements. A few years later, a group of four scholars agitated by Aris's comments led by sLob dpon Padma Tshe dbang, the monk-scholar and former director of the prestigious National Library of Bhutan, published a book in response to Aris's work titled *The Treasure*

[35] Aris (1989: 96-97).

*Revealer of Bhutan: Pemalingpa, the Terma Tradition and its Critics*. The team decided to write their version of Padma gling pa's life and legacy in order "to highlight some contemporary questions about our understanding and interpretation of Himalayan Buddhist cultures."[36] Their critique of Aris's work and scholastic stance takes a sharp tone when they write:

> Causing offence, however, may plausibly be justified. But a closer look at the book shows that it fails to fulfill the requirements of adequate understanding and insight. There might be a case to make against Pemalingpa, who knows. But this book certainly has not made it. No serious proof against Pemalingpa is given by Aris.[37]

Other Tibet specialists took the painful task to express concern about Michael Aris's statements, but the fundamental questions remain unsolved: is Treasure revelation a truthful means of Buddhist transmission? Are Treasure revealers authentic or are they charlatans? We know that these are questions that have always existed among scholars both Tibetan and non-Tibetan. In Tibet, criticism of the Treasure system dates back to the very beginning of the tradition itself in the eleventh century. Outside Tibet, scholars began to inquire about the Treasure tradition only recently.[38]

The newly revived debate about the origins of the *gter ma* tradition gained momentum with the publication of an important article by Matthew Kapstein in 1989. "The Purificatory Gem and Its Cleansing: A Late Tibetan Polemical Discussion of Apocryphal Texts" was to leave a mark and become a reference for the insights it provided into understanding the debates on the authenticity and validity of Treasure revealers in Tibet.[39] One of Kapstein's points in the article was to explore the notion of canonicity by analyzing the positions of two major Tibetan dGe lugs pa scholars Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor (1904-1987) and Thu'u kwan chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802). Kapstein concluded that there is not enough evidence to indicate the existence of a distinct genre of "Buddhist apocrypha" as classified for instance in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He admits, however, that Treasure scriptures are a very close approximation in that are considered authentic by the rNying ma adherents but "pseudepigraphical and anathematic" by their opponents.[40] Kapstein demonstrates that Tibetan scholars attempted to provide criteria with

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[36] Tshewang (1995: vii).
[37] Tshewang (1995: 126).
[38] For another comment on Aris's' statements on Padma gling pa see Martin (2001: 16-29).
[39] Kapstein (1989).
[40] Kapstein (1989: 220).

which to classify and validate revealed material in a context in which two factions emerged: one inclined to attack and one proposing to canonize apocryphal scriptures.[41]

Some scholars have approached the study of revelation in Buddhism from a *comparative* point of view, seeing liturgical analogies in neighboring cultures. Robert Mayer has studied *gter ma* revelation in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and published his reflections in a number of articles and a book titled *A Scripture of The Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis*.[42] His work epitomizes one of the major concerns that haunted many Tibetologists: the origins of the *gter ma* tradition. Largely moved by the urge to contextualize Treasure revelation within Tibetan Buddhism and wider Asian religious traditions, Mayer has not only attempted to follow up on Samuel's clerical/shamanic dichotomy, but he also suggested a solution to the tensions between closed canon/*bKa' 'gyur* and open canon/*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. Whereas the former represents the purity and globalism of the Sanskritic letter and therefore clerical orthodoxy according to Mayer, the latter reflects the need for continuity and localization in which the innovative spirit behind the movement is fueled by fresh revelations (*gter ma*) and visionary productions (*dag snang*). For Mayer, both currents are equally justified and are not necessarily mutually excluding.[43] Mayer suggests Indian antecedents for the Tibetan Treasure tradition, arguing that "the Tibetan gter-ma tradition is primarily a Tibetan elaboration of Buddhist systems already well attested in Indian and Chinese literature many centuries before the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet."[44] For instance, he discusses the practice of *nidhidarśana*, "finding treasures," a cult belonging to the Hindu tradition of Viṣṇu Māyā previously studied by the Dutch Indologist Teun Goudriaan.[45]

Ronald Davidson agrees that the parallels between the Indic notion of *nidhi* and Tibetan Treasure are intriguing.[46] In his impressive historical overview of the ninth- to early thirteenth-century *Tibetan Renaissance*, Davidson dedicates an entire chapter to revelation titled "Treasure Texts, the Imperial Legacy, and the Great Perfection." Expanding on the notion of the imperial ideology behind Treasure revelation, Davidson shows how the birth of this tradition had more to

[41] Kapstein (1989: 243-44).
[42] Mayer (1994, 1996, 1997).
[43] Mayer (1996: 149-53).
[44] Mayer (1996: 70).
[45] Goudriaan (1978).
[46] Davidson (2005).

do with the material remains of the Tibetan empire than with the myth of Padmasambhava's prophetic vision, which developed at a later stage.

An important aspect of Treasure revelation studies is an interest in the voices of Treasure revealers as conveyed in their *autobiographical writings*. This influential medium emphatically unveils the world of *gter ma* revelation through the eyes and words of its agents. The pioneer of studies in Tibetan autobiography as well as the author of the burgeoning topic's most successful study is Janet Gyatso. Gyatso's first attraction to the Treasure tradition in Tibetan Buddhism was sparked by the life and revelations of the great fourteenth- fifteenth-century Treasure revealer Thang stong rgyal po. Since completing her doctoral degree in 1981 with a dissertation on this famed *gter ston* and his tradition titled *The Literary Transmission of the Traditions of Thang-stong rGyal-po: A Study of Visionary Buddhism in Tibet*, Gyatso authored numerous publications about Treasures and their revealers. Using a methodology based on literary theories analyzing autobiography and supported by extensive research in Tibetan Buddhism, Gyatso's study of one of the most prominent Treasure revealers of Tibet, 'Jigs med gling pa (1730-1798), titled *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*, is considered one of the most important Tibetan studies publications in recent decades.[47] Gyatso's works are seminal for various reasons. First of all she belongs to the first generation of scholars who, like Jeffrey Hopkins, Robert Thurman, and Gene Smith, benefited from contact with Tibetans in exile, especially in India and Nepal, and thus were exposed to a new research method borrowed from anthropology, namely that of *ethnographic fieldwork*. Second, she introduced new methodologies in her studies such as those of comparative literature, specifically autobiographical studies, and gender studies. Thirdly, Gyatso framed her writings within the field of the history of religions, a discipline particularly important in American higher education. All this is evident in Gyatso's collections of essays such as "Signs, Memory, and History: A Tantric Buddhist Theory of Scriptural Transmission," "Genre, Authorship, and Transmission in Visionary Buddhism: The Literary Tradition of Thang-stong rGyal-po," and "The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition," to mention only a few.[48] In these works Gyatso opened the field of Tibetan Studies to new facets of the Treasure tradition. In particular, she highlighted the legitimation strategies Treasure revealers and their adherents utilized in order to present themselves and their Treasures as authentic. Although Gyatso suggests possible Indian

[47] Gyatso (1998).
[48] Gyatso (1986, 1992, 1993).

and Chinese antecedents to the Treasure tradition, she emphasizes its indigenous Tibetan factors.[49] She wrote:

> Thus do they who can proclaim that they have discovered Buddhist scriptures in the Tibetan earth (or mind) distinguish themselves. In the course of so doing, the discoverer's appropriation of Indian or of indigenous powers is not merely a reversion to the past or a reinscription of embeddedness. Rather, the thrust of the Treasure discoverer's rhetoric is to make themselves into autonomous individuals, who cultivate spiritual powers without a human teacher.[50]

Of particular interest for the development of the field of rNying ma studies, especially scriptural traditions with an emphasis on *gter ma* material, is the work of David Germano. Germano's exploration of the world of Tibetan Buddhism and especially Tantric lore continues the focus on the *history of religions* point of view. His works are primarily based on the study of *rDzogs chen* (the Great Perfection) with particular attention to the *snying thig* (Seminal Heart) system according to the doctrinal codification of the great rNying ma polymath and Treasure revealer kLong chen rab 'byams pa (1308-1364). One of Germano's strongest assertions is the indigenous origins of the *gter ma* system. Germano graduated in 1982 from the University of Wisconsin where he studied under Geshe Sopa and was immediately hired at the University of Virginia to teach alongside the famous specialist in dGe lugs pa philosophy Jeffrey Hopkins, who founded the University of Virginia's Tibetan Buddhist Studies program in the 1970s. The once dGe lugs pa-oriented program of study has gradually become a rNying ma stronghold.[51] Germano's main interests are tenth- to fourteenth-century Tibetan religious history, Treasure revelation, *rDzogs chen* thought, and the revival of Buddhism in contemporary Tibet. He wrote a seminal essay on the history of *rDzogs chen* titled "Architecture and Absence in the Secret Tantric History of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*)" and a series of articles published in books and on-line.[52] Additionally and more relevant for the present survey, Germano also produced an influential work on the phenomenon of *gter ma* revelation in contemporary Tibet. In his "Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in People's Republic of China," Germano introduced readers to the world of Tibetan Treasure

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[49] Gyatso (1998: 151).
[50] Gyatso (1998: 152-53).
[51] For a description of Jeffrey Hopkins's career see Lopez (1998: 163-75).
[52] Germano has published a number of articles and essays on the Tantric Canon of the rNying ma (*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*) and on Tibetal religious literature on the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library portal. Please see www.thdl.org.

revealers in present-day Tibet, a topic rather neglected by modern scholarship.[53] Combining ethnographic research with historical background, Germano narrates the rise of one of the most famous Treasure revealers of twentieth-century Tibet, mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933-2003), outlining his career as a revealer and the fortunes of his religious encampment called bLa rung sgar in mGo log. His research has showed how this ancient, although controversial, form of scriptural and spiritual legitimation, is still an innovative force against the backdrop of the "transformed landscape" of twentieth-century Tibet.[54]

With Gyatso and Germano, studies on the Tibetan Treasure tradition have entered a new phase. Their ground-breaking works and multidisciplinary approaches have given new momentum to the field. No longer are Treasure texts and their revealers investigated for their "historicity" and "validity," but rather they are explored as a means to understand a tradition and its adherents, to better imagine their socio-historical context, and to interpret the complexities they voice. Therefore, attention has shifted from a purely philological to a more *socio-historical inquiry* in which scholars consider the Treasure authors for what they have produced within their tradition, the social role they play in their communities, and for whom they claim to be.

Another important recent addition to studies in Treasure revelation is the work currently being done on revalation in the Bon tradition. No other work on Treasure revealers with the exception of Gyatso's has gone so far as the monographic study of Dan Martin. His book *Unearthing Bon Treasures: Life and Contested Legacy of a Tibetan Scripture Revealer* finally opens a window on the little known world of Bon po Treasure revealers. Martin shows great concern for studies on the Treasure tradition in other publications as well such as his informative essay on Treasure revelation within the context of the cult of relics called "Pearls from Bones: Relics, Chortens, Tertons and the Signs of Saintly Death in Tibet."[55] Another scholar and prolific author of studies in the rNying ma and Bon traditions is the Frenchman Jean-Luc Achard. With particular attention to the role of Treasure revelation in the production and development of the *rDzogs chen* doctrine, Achard has devoted much of his time to the study of material from various Treasure revealers and their literary productions. Among his most representative works are "bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480-1535) et la Révélation du *Yang tig ye shes mthong grol*," *L'Essence Perlée du Secret — Recherches philologiques et historiques et historiques sur l'origine de la*

[53] Goldstein and Kapstein (1998: 53-94).
[54] Germano (1998: 76).
[55] Martin (2001, 1994).

*Grande Perfection dans la tradition rNying ma pa*, and *Bon Po Hidden Treasures: A catalogue of bDe chen gling pa's Collected Revelations*, which are significant readings for anyone seriously interested in the field.[56]

Despite the plurality of topics and the multifaceted aspects of the Treasure revelation phenomenon, that of authenticity is probably the one that has spurred more attention among scholars over the years. Another example of this is Andreas Doctor's work *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, published in 2005. An interesting feature of his book is his translation and study of 'Ju mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912)'s complex text *gTer ston rtag pa chu dwangs nor bu* in which he warns about the dangers of false Treasure revealers and how to validate them.[57]

Current scholarship is becoming more nuanced by expanding on earlier research methodologies but also building new trends. As in other disciplines like the study of Christianity, *gender* is becoming an increasingly active analytical category in Treasure studies. More and more students combine innovative methodological attitudes drawn from *literary theory*, *anthropology*, and *gender studies* with language skills and fieldwork research among "contemporary" Tibetans in their land. For example, Sarah Jacoby applies literary theory focusing on autobiography and gender studies to analyze the auto/biographical writings and life of the famed female *gter ston* mKha' 'gro bde ba'i rdo rje (a.k.a Se ra mkha' 'gro) (1892-1940) and the social context in which she lived.[58] Her study investigates the ways in which a female religious leader arose in a largely male dominated religious culture in addition to analyzing the issue of consort practices in the context of revelation from a female perspective. She discloses a world of revelation and devotion for us, but also a world of power, conflicting tensions between monastic and non-celibate lifestyles, and religious community tensions. Such a study offers us an interesting platform from which to understand the same issues as they appear in the contemporary perspective.

Finally, turning our gaze to contemporary Tibet, the present-day context is rich in opportunities to study the Treasure tradition and the Treasure revealers. Alongside explorations of other previously understudied groups such as *sngags pas*, and *rnal 'byor pas*, Treasure revealers' contemporary activities and cultural influence are claiming more attention and interest from current historians of Tibetan religions. The investigation of *lived religion*, in this case the

[56] Achard (1999, 2004, 2005).
[57] Doctor (2005: 31-51).
[58] Jacoby (2007).

practice of Treasure revelation, offers a window into the ongoing life and significance of Treasure revealers. In a conservative culture like that of Tibet, the study of living Treasure revealers has the potential to help understand the phenomena in the past. The variety of sources employed in the study of lived religion show the complexities of the phenomenon and the creativity of expression reached by the religious community in general and the Treasure revealers in particular. Today's Treasure revealers' productions include not only catalogues of their Treasures (*gter rdzas*), Treasure teachings (*gter chos*), and *opera omnia* (*gsung 'bum*), but also pamphlets, pins, talismans, photos and posters, audio-tapes, VCDs, and DVDs, and more recently Websites. Although all these products are not necessarily of great artistic or literary value, they are nevertheless valuable glimpses into the phenomenon of revalation in the present-day context.

More needs to be done to understand the role and the meaning of Treasure revelation in Tibet today. Revelation in all its aspects such as Treasure items (*gter rdzas*), mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*), and pure visions (*dag snang*) is still a vibrant force behind the technologies of Tantric literature and ritual in today's Tibet. The figure of the *gter ston* is as active as the criticism he or she sometimes attracts relating to his/her lifestyle and moral behavior within the religious community. Is it possible that present-day Treasure revealers are moved by the same urge and the same necessity to reveal and disseminate their Treasures as their predecessors? What does it mean to be a Treasure revealer, and are the criteria for evaluation the same as in the past? And especially, are the Treasure cycles (*gter skor*) and teachings (*gter chos*) valued the same as they were in the past? These are only a few of the working questions that I have attempted to address in my writings including "Visions, Arcane Claims, and Hidden Treasures: Charisma and Authority in a Present-Day Gter ston" published in 2002 and "Tibetan Buddhism Beyond the Monastery: Revelation and Identity in rNying ma Communities of Present-day Kham" in 2008. A study of Tibetan ideas of authentic Treasure revealers titled "'*Anything is an Appropriate Treasure Teaching!*' Authentic Treasure Revealers and the Moral Implications of Non-celibate Tantric Activities" is in press.[59] I believe that the study of present-day Treasure revealers and their works can benefit the study of the Treasure tradition in general and can help us understand more about this tradition as a distinctive facet of Tibetan religion.

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[59] Terrone (2002).

## *Scope of the Project and Outline of the Chapters*

Despite the fact that there have been a number of studies devoted to Buddhism in contemporary Tibet, no book-length investigation of Treasure revelation in present-day Tibetan regions of the PRC has been published to date. This dissertation fills this lacuna in research on modern Tibet. Within that, the present study has two main aims. The first is to explore how currently active Treasure revealers have revived and reinvented their Treasure revelation practices in the face of major social and political changes that have taken place in the PRC. Through an analysis of contemporary Sino-Tibetan politics and the role of religion therein, this study answers the following questions: why and how have religion, and the Treasure revelation tradition in particular, enjoyed a resurgence under Chinese rule? What does the Treasure tradition offer today to Tibetans and an impressive number of ethnic Chinese as well? The second aim of this work is to investigate why and how people become Treasure revealers in Tibet by focusing on the life and religious activities of one such contemporary Treasure revealer, gTer chen bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. Years of fieldwork using participant observation methods living with bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and members of his community provide important data that help us understand the dynamics of these religious congregations and the roles they play in their teachers’ revelations and doctrinal compositions.

In Chapter One, I open this study with an introduction to the major features of the Treasure tradition as it is represented in some popular Tibetan religious literary works on the subject. Far from being an exhaustive history, it nevertheless provides background on how the narrative strategies on the origins of Treasure revelations emerged as a revitalization effort with multiple objectives: 1) to assert rNying ma/Ancient identity within the gSar ma/New emerging Buddhist schools in the Tibetan religious renaissance; 2) to revive the supremacy of the early translation movement, the Tibetan imperial ideology, and the royal patronage of Buddhism during the eighth-century dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet; 3) to maintain an open rNying ma canon *vis-à-vis* the larger Tibetan Buddhist canon, thus legitimating newly composed doctrinal material; and 4) to affirm the important role that the non-celibate religious elite had in the dissemination of Buddhist doctrine in Tibet. This background in the Treasure tradition will create the matrix on which we can further develop our understanding of the phenomenon as it exists today. My interest in such a task is to demonstrate one central thesis of this study: just as Treasure ideologies originally came into being as a response to the religious and political

pressures in tenth-century Tibet when "modern" traditions challenged the old/ancient communities, likewise in the present context some Tibetan religious leaders employ Treasure revelation as a successful means to respond to the political pressures of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Tibet under Chinese rule.

Chapter Two offers an overview of the socio-political impact of decades of Chinese government religious policies in Tibet. My extensive fieldwork experience indicates that as in the past, the phenomena of the decline of Buddhism, the arrival of external colonizing forces, the re-creation of a link to the imperial and glorious age of dynastic Tibet, and the therapeutic power of freshly revealed Buddhist materials are still acting as major channels of collective memory. Additionally, the economic and political scenarios and the forces of change that appeared in post-Mao China allowed Tibetan areas to engage again in more overt expressions of religious belief and practice. In the past three decades Tibetans in the eastern areas of Khams and A mdo have gradually regained access to many popular practices forbidden in the Maoist past such as pilgrimages, offering to monasteries, the erection of private shrines at home, and local ceremonies and festivals.

In such a context, I argue that the Chinese government's political strategies applied to Tibetan areas relating to the large-scale economic development of the country have caused a weakening of crucial religious authority for many monastic institutions by debilitating their economic power, incapacitating their political influence, limiting their education authority, and diminishing one of their crucial instruments, their large monastic population. After years of persecution and political control, the historical role of monasteries as exclusive guarantors of religious authority and scholastic legitimacy and as institutional centers of traditional instruction has drastically decreased. Nevertheless, the Tibetans' spirit of adaptation and their struggle for the preservation of their religious and cultural identity has resulted in a reastablishment of many monastic activities including the publication of religious material, some collective religious festivals and rituals, and in some cases a revitalized education and instructional system for monastics. Concomitantly, however, a number of alternative forms of religious authority have emerged in eastern Tibet that emphasize the often eclectic nature of the rNying ma community such as visionary activities, Treasure revelation, and the formation of large and innovative religious communities as centers of practice and cultural production.

Within this socio-religious background, Chapter Three claims that visionary revelations seem to be particularly fit to reestablish a religious discourse with regard to ritual authority, the

codification of new identities, and the promotion of ancient religious narratives. Tibetan religious professionals such as Treasure revealers and non-celibate Tantric adepts (*sngags pa*) have become increasingly visible in the religious and social landscape of Tibet. Treasure revelations, often in the form of publicly witnessed events (*khrom gter*) play an important role in fostering faith in the devotees, nurturing hope in the followers, and in contributing to the preservation and continuation of the traditional transmission of the Buddhist teachings and meditation practices.

In Chapter Three, I also discuss in detail some of the features that characterize Treasure activities in modern Tibet through introducing a number of contemporary visionaries who mostly live and operate in northern and central areas of Khams. I explore the charismatic aspect of their leadership, the different aspects of their revelations, and the communities that surround them. Large religious encampments (*chos sgar*) and smaller Tantric mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) led by Treasure revealers (*gter ston*), non-celibate Tantric adepts (*sngags pa*), and ascetic yogis (*rnal 'byor pa*) have emerged in recent decades. Their leaders have succesfully reestablished local control over religious identity and their system of education, which has been threatened so often under the current regime. Far from being either large administrative monastic institutions or small mountain retreats, these religious gatherings or religious encampments are characterized by a new emphasis on traditional education and instruction. The ambivalent nature of these hybrid encampments—both monastery and mountain hermitage, both monastic and lay residents, both monks and nuns—which often host thousands of Buddhist practitioners and enthusiastic devotees, has recently translated into a threat felt by Chinese government authorities and officials. Behind the controversial control of the Chinese government over Tibetan religious encampments is its sensitivity to issues related to links between the religious centers and the Tibetan government in exile, support for the Dalai Lama, and the presence of anti-Chinese sentiments and activities easily perceived by the central government as "splittist." (Ch. *fenlie*). Nevertheless, present-day Treasure revealershave been largely succesful in developing their religious communities despite the costraints of the current political climate.

Chapter Three will therefore analyze the revitalization of the Treasure tradition and the cult of the Treasure revealers as evidence of Tibetans' ongoing attempts to regain access to previous forms of Tibetan Buddhist authority and traditional religious transmission, and to portray their role in the formation of some of the most active rNying ma communities in twentieth-century Khams. As we shall see in more detail below, *gter* revelation, the cult of Treasure revealers, the constitution of religious communities around them, and the phenomenon

of the non-monastic, or better quasi-monastic religious encampments (*chos sgar*) have given a vibrant impulse to the practice of Buddhism in recent decades, but especially after the early 1980s.

## gTer chen bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje

Chapter Four will introduce us to the life and religious experience of one such present-day Treasure revealer, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. Born in 1921 to a nomadic family in sKye rgu mdo county (Yushu TAP), bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life was fueled with the freedom of movement and straightforwardness of life as a nomad. Due to a difficult childhood, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje showed a predilection for a solitary lifestyle. This soon led him towards contemplative isolation in the wilderness. At the age of six he left his native land and parted from his family, living for a few years the life of a vagabond. In tune with the lifestyle of influential Tibetan yogis, who have become milestone models in Tibet’s religious history, such as rJe btsun Mi la ras pa and Zhabs dkar, the young would-be *gter ston* also chose the path of hardship and solitary confinement as the way to personal liberation.[60] His early visions and ecstatic experiences associated with Padmasambhava were later interpreted as signs of a specific auspicious connection (*rten ’brel*) with a distant past of Tibetan history. More exclusively, this association was soon to determine the young bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s future as one of Padmasambhava’s main emissaries (*pho nya*) and then to his being proclaimed a Treasure revealer.

By looking at bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life we have the opportunity to explore the paradigms that are enacted in the process of recognition of a Treasure revealer. Additionally, we will examine to the dynamics and circumstances that were conducive to the formation of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje as a Treasure revealer. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje began to experience visions and prophetic dreams very early in his life, visions that announced his potential career as a revealer. He met his first teacher, bKra shis chos ’phel, with whom he studied Tibetan language and entered the path of Buddhist practice. After having received teachings and complete

[60] rJe bstun Mi la ras pa bzhad pa’i rdo rje (1040-1123) is the most famous and beloved among Tibet’s greatest *yogi*s. His biography, *rJe btsun mi la ras pa’i rnam thar rgyas par phye ba mgur 'bum* by gTsang smyon He ru ka (1452-1507), is among the most popular and influential life accounts in Tibet. Disciple of another great religious figure of twelfth century Tibet, Mar pa lo tsa ba chos kyi blo gros (1012-97), founder of the bKa' brgyud tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Mi la ras pa is the model of all Tibetan Buddhist ascetics. Another great example of Tibetan *yogi* and hermit is Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol (1781-1851), one of the most well-known rNying ma ascetics of the eighteenth century.

instructions on the *naro mkha' spyod* and Vajrayoginī (*rdo rje rnal 'byor ma*) from bKra shis chos 'phel, bDe chen 'od sgal rdo rje set off on a long pilgrimage in search of sacred sites and holy places where he could practice in solitude. His quest brought him not only to the major sacred places (*gnas chen*) of central Tibet, but also as far as Bhutan, Nepal, and India, which he reached in the mid 1940s, just a few years before the British Raj left India.

Despite the fact that he spent most of his formative years traveling across central Tibet studying with some of the most renowned teachers of twentieth-century Tibet, it was back in his native land of Khams in the late 1940s that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje met those who were to become his most influential teachers, Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje and especially Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje. Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje (also known as dPal me mkhyen brtse kun bzang 'gro 'dul, 1897-1946) was a monastic and among the most outstanding practitioners and teachers of the bKa' brgyud school of Tibetan Buddhism. He was the founder of the dPla me mdo sngags bshad grub sgling monastery in Shar mda', Nang chen, in Qinghai. Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje (1926-c.1978) was one of the most active Buddhist practitioners and teachers of *rDzogs chen*, the Great Perfection system of meditation. Originally from Nyag rong (hence his name Nyag rong bla ma), he was a non-celibate *mantrin* (*sngags pa*) who lived most of his life in the religious encampment (*chos sgar*) Nyag bla sgar (or Nyag bla dgon) that he established in the Go 'jo area of Chab mdo. He received teachings from both rNying ma and Bon po teachers. The distinctive characteristics of these religious figures were to leave a profound impact on bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, for whom they were major sources of inspiration. They recognized the young practitioner's potential for Treasure (*gter ma*) revelation and encouraging his visionary activities. Since the early 1940s bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has revealed more than four-hundred Treasure texts collected in twelve volumes.

Soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje established a series of small mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) on the well-known Great Sacred Site Lotus Crystal Mountain (gNas chen padma shel ri) in the Small Zur mang (Ch. Xiao Sumang) area near sKye rgu mdo and rDza mer chen, in Shar 'da', Nang chen. He was able to accomplish this because of the support of some monastic communities of the area, especially Zur mang and dPal me monasteries with which he maintained strong contacts. In 1979 bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje aligned himself with the main liturgical practices of dPal me monastery on account of a series of re-discoveries (*yang gter*) associated with his previous teacher and mentor, Grub dbang bde

chen rdo rje, who had been the founder of the monastery. This shows us the often interrelated nature of Treasure revealers and monastic institutions.

From 2001 to 2007 bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje lived at the rDza mer chen lhun grub gling nunnery at the invitation of the spiritual leaders of the convent. There he provided spiritual assistance, guidance, and ritual instructions for the monastic retreatants, mainly nuns who live in retreat at the meditation centre (*sgrub khang*) of the nunnery at the foot of Mount rDza mer chen. With a small but thriving community of monastics, lay followers, and non-celibate practitioners, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s activities are gaining momentum and his collection of revealed teachings fills more than ten volumes, making him one of the most prolific and active Treasure revealers in present-day Khams. In 2008 bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje accompanied by bKra shis mtsho mo and a handful of largely female monastics moved to his newly built nunnery, ’Od gsal chos gling a few miles west of Shar mda’ town.

Chapter Five opens with a description and analysis of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s collection of Treasure cycles and offers brief outlines and a study of his production. Aside from the collection of revelations, among bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s manuscripts are some texts that he composed that can provide insight into his identity as a Treasure revealer and the importance he attached to his discoveries. In Chapter Five I elaborate on some of the features of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s Treasures and teachings, which follow the classical and conventional triad sets of *bla rdzogs thugs*. By looking at his Treasure cycles and especially the *Yang gsang rdo rje me char*, I argue that one of the central themes of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s revelation production is to provide legitimacy and status to the class of non-celibate Tantric professionals called the white-robed and matted-haired group (*gos dkar lcang lo’i sde*). Particularly important in this regard is the *rTsol med*, a Treasure teaching attributed to Padmasambhava that represents an initiation ritual for Tantric adepts. Interestingly, this text lists a number of regalia (*rgyan*) that supposedly provide the adept with the appropriate signs of his rank. My argument is that such a ritual scripture is not only intended to provide legitimacy to the class of non-celibate adepts, but also provides a distinctive identity to the lineage initiated by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje.

As a Treasure revealer, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje instructs his disciples predominantly by employing doctrinal teachings and instructional material drawn from his cycles of revelations. Largely modeling his religious person on that of many Treasure revealers of the past, namely his two major teachers Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje and Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje, bDe chen ’od

gsal rdo rje represents the non-celibate Tantric practitioner. Many Tibetan Buddhists believe that a *gter ston* is a source of *gter ma* items and teachings but also of wisdom and divine power. The Treasure revealer is thus revered as a highly energizing and centripetal force in the maintenance of religious beliefs and practices and in the establishment and development of religious revival and cultural identity. In the final part of this last chapter I will, therefore, also provide some analysis of the social role that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje plays in his community by describing the way he represents himself not only as a Treasure revealer but also as a prognosticator and healer.

# Chapter One: Treasures and Their Revealers: Discovering Buddhism in Tibet



## *Introduction*

Many religious systems in the world believe that mystical revelations of divine words appeared on earth through the intercession of inspired human beings. According to the Mahāyāna tradition of Buddhism in the third century BCE Nāgārjuna propagated the Perfection of Wisdom (Skt. *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) after he had received the scriptures from the Nāga deities.[61] Some Tibetan Buddhists practice a system of contemplation techniques known as the Great Perfection (*rDzogs chen*) that was first transmitted by a primordial Buddha, Samantabhadra (Kun tu bzang po) to semi-historical human beings including dGa' rab rdo rje, who then disseminated it to his disciples.

Tibetans believe that in the eighth century the Indian master Padmasambhava (Tib. Padma 'byung gnas) concealed entire collections of Tantric scriptures and physical religious artifacts in the geographical landscape of Tibet. This was apparently done with the intent or "aspiration" that these cycles of doctrines would be retrieved in the future by reincarnations of his close disciples for the welfare of the Buddhist doctrine and the spiritual development of the faithful.[62] Although in Tibet there are a few religious figures, both Buddhist and Bon, associated with the concealement of artifacts and scriptural cycles, today's Buddhist Treasure revelation movements emphasize the dominant role of Padmasambhava as the originator of the tradition of hiding sacred items and spiritual teachings. These religious scriptures and artifacts are known as *gter ma* (Treasures) and their revelation has been carried on for the past thousand years.

In order to better understand the role and the activities of Treasure revealers in Tibet today, it will be necessary to first examine how the tradition of concealing Treasures developed and when the revelation began. This is justified by the fact that Treasure revealers consider

[61] Lamotte (1958), Thurman (1984: 22-24).

[62] Thondup (1986: 60-66). On the historicity or non-historicity of Padmasambhava see Guenther (1996), Bischoff (1978), and Dargyay (1977). Snellgrove and Richardson observed that Padmasambhava can be seen as the embodiment of the idealized model of a *yogi*-saint. Whether Padmasambhava was an actual historical person is secondary to the fact that Tibetans from the twelfth century onwards saw him as a representation of the perfect sage and master. See Snellgrove and Richardson (1968: 171).

themselves the successors of those early figures and recipients of those doctrines. This chapter examines some of the central features of the Treasure (*gter ma*) tradition as described within Tibetan Buddhism.[63] A significant amount of information on the topic can be found in various Tibetan literary works such as religious histories (*chos 'byung*), biographies (*rnam thar*), doxographies (*grub mtha'*), polemical writings (*dgag lan*), and of course, revealed Treasures (*gter chos*) themselves. However, despite the richness of material, a comprehensive study of the *gter ma* tradition has still to be attempted by Western scholarship and would require a complete study of its own.[64] This chapter does not attempt to write such a history of the Treasure revelation tradition. Rather, the scope of this chapter is to provide a general overview of the phenomenon of the Treasure tradition in Tibet as addressed in a diverse selection of ancient Tibetan literary works as well as recent ones. In doing so, particular emphasis will be put on understanding the Treasure ideology and how this ideology was legitimized by projecting its origins around the eighth-century figure of Padmasambhava/Padma 'byung gnas in the frame of the so-called early translation period (*snga 'gyur*) of Buddhist Tantric material from India. For a window on the contemporary twentieth- and twenty-first-century narrative of the Treasure tradition and the role of Padmasambhava there in, we will examine above all the writings of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, the central subject of this dissertation. What is the Treasure tradition? Who was Padmasambhava and is he the only concealer of Treasures? Who are the Treasure revealers? What are the Treasures they reveal? These are the major questions we will address in this chapter.

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[63] "rNying ma" is a Tibetan term referring to anything "old" and "ancient", and in a Tibetan religious context denotes the community of early religious groups that adhered to the *snga 'gyur* tradition of early translations of the first Tibetan Buddhist communities. The term is in opposition to *gsar ma* "new", but often translated "modernist" in this study, that in Tibetan refers to the general wave of reformation trends that began to appear in Tibet since the late tenth century proposing new translations (*gsar 'gyur*). See Davidson (2005: 84-85).

The rNying ma tradition has a long history of Buddhist transmission in Tibet. It is represented by a large corpus of doctrinal and ritual material mainly orginated in the early phase of Buddhist introduction (*snga dar*) in Tibet (seventh to tenth century). Predominantly esoterical in its doctrinal aspects, the rNying ma tradition boasts unique traditions such as the *Mahāyoga*, *Anuyoga* and *Atiyoga/rDzogs pa chen po*. Historically, the origins of the school stem back from the eighth century during the presence and deeds of Padmasambhava. He supposedly was an Indian sage and Tantric master from Oḍḍiyāna (or Uḍḍiyāna) and is considered to be among the first promulgators of Buddhist teachings in the land of snows. As we shall see in detail below, the rNying ma school recognizes two main transmissions of Tantric teachings: the long transmission of the oral teachings (*ring brgyud bka' ma*), and the short transmission of the Treasures (*nye brgyud gter ma*).

[64] See for instance, Dargyay (1997), Prats (1982), Gyatso (1998), Germano (1998), Achard (2004), and recently Doctor (2005). In this volume I have included a bibliography of Western literature about the Treasure tradition and its revealers. See "A General Bibliography of the Tibetan Treasure Tradition".

## *Locating gter ma in the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition*

The central and literal meaning of the Tibetan word *gter* is "treasure." However, in Tibetan, forms of the noun *gter* have at least two connotations. First, the secular meaning of *gter* is generally rendered in compounds such as *gter rdzas* or *gter rigs* "minerals," *gter mdzod* "treasury," and *gter kha*, "mineral deposit" or "mine" (literary "Treasure door").[65] In religious discourse of Tibetan Buddhism the word *gter* is also assigned a more specific meaning that goes beyond conventional language. In the rNying ma tradition the noun *gter* is commonly used in the basic compound *gter ma* "Treasure" with *ma* being a nominalizing suffix, to identify hidden Tantric scriptures and sacred objects concealed in secret places to preserve them and keep them inaccessible by ordinary means. One of the definitions of the word *gter ma* is "religious teachings and precious objects retrieved from a mine" (*gter nas blangs pa'i chos dang nor*).[66] However, the word *gter* is also often identified as an "abbreviated word for Treasure teaching" (*gter chos kyi bsdus ming*).[67] The Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary (*Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*) provides the following definition:

> The Buddhist teachings taken from a deposit (*gter*) are profound Tantric instructions, inappropriate to be taught when the time is inopportune for the welfare of human beings. The master Padma 'byung gnas entrusted the teachings to the *ḍākinī*,[68] and temporarily sealed them (the teachings) in rocky mountains, rivers, and trees for the welfare of the future fortunate human beings. Later, realized beings have retrieved them from the deposits and written them down in the form of utterly profound and unequalled cycles of teachings.[69]

For the Tibetan Buddhist devotees, especially those affiliated with the rNying ma order, a single *gter* item, whether as a sacred artifact or as a religious scripture, is believed to contain the quintessence of the Buddha's teachings. When talking of Treasures to Tibetans, in most cases the first association they make is with a material object, such as *vajra*, ritual bells, or *kīla* daggers

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[65] *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (1993: 1047), Goldstein (2001: 452, 453). dGe bshes chos kyi grags pa's *brDa dag ming tshig gsal ba* (1995: 339) identifies the term *gter* as "items for important functions and Treasures under the soil" (*mkho bar bya ba'i rdzas dang sa'i 'og gter zer ba lta bu*). It is worth noting that in many areas of Khams, religious perosonalities employ the term *gter* and/or *gter kha* when referring to Treasure teachings. gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan's personal communication. rDza mer chen dgon, Shar mda' (Yushu TAP) 2001.

[66] rGya ye bKra shis phun tshogs (1997: 45).

[67] *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (1993: 1047).

[68] The *ḍākinī* (Tib. *mkha' 'gro ma* or "sky-goer") are celestial beings with feminine attributes allegedly selected by Padmasambhava as dispensers of special teachings, messages, and announcers of Treasure revelations to Treasure revealers.

[69] *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (1993: 1047-1048).

excavated or retrieved from a geographical setting. However, most of the Tibetan devotees I have met in Tibet are familiar with the word *gter ma* only in the context of oral tradition and have learned to consider these objects as relics associated with the figure of Padmasambhava either during public empowerments, teachings, or talks by local religious figures. The items retrieved in such a religious ritual context are considered spiritually empowered with the energetic presence (*byin rlabs*) and aspiration (*smon lam*) of Padmasambhava and his disciples. What ordinary people seek from exposure to *gter* items is the blessed power believed to be retained by these objects. Theologically, Treasure relics, just like Buddhist relics in general, retain linkage to the past and the ability to "retell" a story in the present. As we will see in the pages ahead, despite the existence of multiple types of Treasures, all supposedly come from the past, the mythologized past of Tibet. As John Strong rightly observes when he explains the meaning of Buddhist relics, relics retell a story, a biographical narrative, the life of the Buddha, and "they reiterate both his [the Buddha's] provenance and his impermanence."[70]

Typologically, however, Treasures do not comprise exclusively physical religious objects. On a higher level *gter ma*, especially the act of "revealing" them, refers also to a method of transmitting teachings. The "Ancient" or rNying ma School emphasizes a long transmission of the canonical Tantric teachings (*ring brgyud bka' ma*), which represents the uninterrupted long conduction of symbolic transmission (*brda brgyud*), mental transmission (*dgongs brgyud*), and oral transmission (*snyan brgyud*). While the first two categories are believed to take place only among Buddhas and their celestial emanations, the oral transmission is the one passed directly from human masters to their disciples.[71] It also recognizes a short transmission of the Treasure teachings (*nye brgyud gter ma*), which is a direct way of transmitting esoteric knowledge. The word *nye*, short or shortened, refers to the idea that between Padmasambhava and the revealer of his teachings the message has not been altered by intermediaries and therefore the revealer transmits the knowledge directly as he received it in the past from Padmasambhava. Hence, the *bka' ma* tradition represents the Buddha's teachings in their continuous transmission from teacher to disciple in an unbroken succession since the origin of the teachings themselves. The *gter ma* teachings, also called the lineage of the re-discovered Treasures (*yang gter gyi brgyud pa*), have skipped centuries, putatively passing from the eighth century directly to whichever century the teachings were to be revealed and diffused. Allegedly sealed up and concealed in a

[70] Strong (2004: 7).
[71] Thondup (1987: 39).

benighted era, the Treasure teachings were supposed to be recovered and revealed when intellectual and social life was appropriate. Moving beyond the limitations of linear transmission from lineage holders to their selected disciples, *gter ma* teachings are believed to be revealed to the fortunate recipients directly by Padmasambhava and his closest disciples, nullifying any obstacle posed by space and time. Being largely practice and contemplation oriented, the Treasure literature is preserved as a collection of rituals and practical instructions for meditation and spiritual development in the tradition of meditative realization (*sgrub sde*) and is meant to appear only when the time is proper.

A third system of transmitting Buddhist knowledge and teachings according to the rNying ma tradition is that of the so-called "profound pure visions" (*zab mo dag snang*). The border line between *dag snang* and *gter ma* is so blurred that some Tibetan scholars consider pure visions to be Treasures, while others do not. Pure visions constitute the profound transmission of special teachings given by Buddhas, bodhisattvas, sages, and *ḍākinī* (*mkha' 'gro ma*) not only to Treasure revealers but also to highly experienced Tantric adepts. Tulku Thondup warns that despite the apparent similarities they share with mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*) pure visions are not to be confused with Treasures themselves.[72] The point is that whereas Treasure teachings have been concealed with the specific technique of the "mind mandate transmission" (*gtad rgya*), pure visions are transmitted as special teachings by non-human beings such as Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and deities in a non-Treasure transmission context.[73]

Generally speaking, the rNying ma tradition classifies Treasures into two broad classes identified in accordance with the place where they were presumably hidden.[74] These two places can either be geographical places or subtle and ethereal settings. Therefore, according to this classification, Treasures can be either earth Treasures or mind Treasures. Earth Treasures (*sa gter*) are generally considered those physical items and objects, in most cases ritual implements or religious statues, or small yellow scroll manuscripts (*shog gser*) discovered and retrieved from specific places such as earth, rocks, or lakes. Mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*) instead define Tantric teachings believed to be revealed to an accomplished adept (*sgrub pa'i skyes bu*) and written down in the form of a scripture. Theologically speaking, in order for a Treasure revealer to complete the cycles of revelations he should reveal three classes of teachings as *bla rdzogs*

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[72] Thondup (1986: 90-91).
[73] Thondup (1986: 90-91).
[74] For an overview of the system of classification of Tantric teachings according to the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism see Dargyay (1977), and Thondub (1987: 31-47; 1989), and Dorje and Kapstein (1991: 691).

*thugs* associated with Padmasambhava, the teacher (*bla* [*ma*]), the Great Perfection (*rdzogs* [*chen*]), and Avalokiteśvara (*thugs* [*rje chen po*]).

Historically, the Treasures were an attempt to combine a rich network of mythic narratives with ritual practices in Tibetan Buddhist religion.[75] The appropriation of an idealized historical past was fundamental for the construction and shaping of a distinctive rNying ma identity. rNying ma adherents chose to continue the legacy of the Buddhist scriptures written during the early translation period with the revelation-based composition of innovative and often influential collections of Tantric teachings.[76] Within such a shaping of identity, an important role is taken by memory and the persistence of the idealized image of the empire which once characterized the Tibetan civilization and that established the basis for its subsequent Buddhist conversion. Indeed, essential to the rNying ma genesis is the reconnection to the imperial age of Tibet, the cradle of Tibetan Buddhist civilization, together with the renewed awareness of the putative creator of the rNying ma tradition, Padmasambhava. Within the ideological framework of Treasure revelations, the dominance of empire-related imagery and the recollection of the deeds of the great religious kings (*chos rgyal*) of the past, such as Srong btsan sgam po and Khri srong lde'u btsan, strengthen a sense of collective identity, often pervaded with nationalistic undertones.[77]

Before crystallizing around the mytho-historical figure of Padmasambhava, according to rNying ma scholars there were other past Tibetan and Indian figures of the past who were responsible for concealing various Tantric scriptures now central to the rNying ma tradition. Among many other achievements, Srong btsan sgam po, the seventh-century emperor of Tibet, is considered responsible for the patronage of the first mass translation of Indic Tantric material into Tibetan that was later to be remembered as the beginning of the early translation period (*snga 'gyur*). Additionally, he is credited with the compilation and concealment of a number of scriptures of both religious and historiographical nature, in particular the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*, a liturgical scripture concerned with the cult of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the majority of which was revealed and written down in the twelfth century by the Treasure revealers dNgos grub and Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer.(1124-1192?).[78] Furthermore, the emperor is credited with the

[75] Dreyfus (1998: 30-34); Tucci (1949: 112).
[76] Samuel (1993: 533-34).
[77] Dreyfus (1998: 28-40) is particularly keen on associating Treasure scriptures with Tibetans' collective memory and national identity. However, Anne-Marie Blondeau (2001: 116-19) does not agree with such an interpretation.
[78] Blondeau (1984: 77-123); Kapstein (1992: 83).

composition and concealment of other scriptures, the *bKa' chems ka khol ma*, the *bKa' rtsis chen mo*, the *Dar dkar gsal ba'i me long*, and the *Zla ba'i 'dod 'jo*.[79] These scriptures are believed to have been excavated by the eleventh-century Bengali Buddhist teacher Atiśa (Dīpaṃkara Srījñāna, 982-1054) from one of the central pillars inside the Jo khang temple in Lhasa in 1048.[80]

Two major Indian Tantric masters are also alleged to have concealed Buddhist teachings. According to the history of the transmission of the *snying thig* or "Seminal Heart" system of *rDzogs chen*, after having received the teachings directly from his teacher dGa' rab rdo rje in a vision, Mañjuśrīmitra (Tib. 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen, c. seventh/eighth century) organized them into two classes of Tantras, the *snyan rgyud* (oral Tantras) and *bshad rgyud* (explanatory Tantras), and concealed the latter not far from Bodh Gaya in India.[81] Vimalamitra (Dri med bshes gnyen, c. eighth century), an Indian Tantric master, received cycles of teachings belonging to the *snying thig* system from Jñānasūtra (Ye shes mdo) in India. He apparently composed three copies of these Tantric teachings and concealed them in three different places in Oḍḍiyāna (Swat) entrusting them to the king of Nāgas, in the Suvarṇadvīpa cave in Kashmir, and in Prabhāskara, a charnel ground in India. Vimalamitra is also credited with disseminating the teachings of the sNying thig system in Tibet while visiting upon the invitation of emperor Khri srong lde'u bstan. After transmitting his Tantric teachings, which came to be known in Tibet as the *Bi ma'i snying thig* (Vimalamitra's Seminal Heart), he hid them in a cave at mChims phu not far from the bSam yas monastery in southern Tibet.[82]

Despite the rNying ma records claim that these personalities were responsible for the concealment of Buddhist teachings that were later extracted or revealed as Treasures beginning in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the narrative of the origins of the Treasure revelation tradition did not develop around them. On the contrary, it predominantly focused on the Indian Tantric master Padmasambhava who supposedly arrived in Tibet in the eighth century. Also by invitation of emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan. Therefore, I argue that while the first two events are examples of the phenomenon of Treasure Buddhist texts in Tibet, the narrative of Padmasambava is the core of the Treasure revelation tradition that developed between the twelfth and the fourteenth century.

[79] Vostrikov (1970: 27-57); Dudjom (1991: 511).
[80] Martin (1997: 24-25); van der Kuijp (1996; 47-49); Eimer (1983).
[81] Thondup (1984: 50).
[82] Thondup (1984: 54-59); Dudjom (1991: 501).

## *Padmasambhava and the Sources of the Treasure Narrative*

Although the presence of Padmasambhava in eighth-century Tibet has been documented through the analysis of a small number of liturgical scriptures attributed to him, there is no historical evidence dating back to that time proving that Padmasambhava actually concealed teachings as Treasures.[83] On the other hand, some histories of Padmasambhava that began to appear a few centuries later do focus on him as the creator of the Treasure concealment tradition. These histories are valued as the sources of the tradition as it is represented today.

The figure of Padmasambhava as the main originator of the Treasure tradition seems to emerge in the twelfth century when the first Treasure revealers claimed to have revealed biographical accounts of Padmasambhava. For instance, the *Zangs gling ma*, or *bKa' thang zangs gling ma*, was the first such biographical account of Padmasambhava that Mnga' bdag nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer revealed in the twelfth century.[84] Here Padmasambhava's major deeds including the subjugation of deities, dissemination of Buddhist teachings, and the magico-ritual concealment of Treasures in the then benighted age in anticipation of future worries are depicted in the scenario of eighth-century imperial Tibet.[85]

However, to fully understand the notion of "Treasures" and appreciate their purport in contemporary Tibetan Buddhism, I will provide a brief survey of their mythical history as it is predominantly represented in Tibetan traditional literature. According to the dominant tradition, Padmasambhava is portrayed as the founder of the Treasure tradition.[86] According to rNying ma traditional sources such as the *Padma bka' thang* (henceforth PKT) and the *bKa' thang sde lnga*, the presence of Padmasambhava in Tibet is associated with both the subduing of anti-Buddhist demons responsible for obstacles to the diffusion of Buddhism and the establishment of the

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[83] van Sheik (2007), Dalton (2004), Eastman (1983).

[84] Blondeau (1980: 49); Martin (1997: 32). For a translation of the *Zangs gling ma* in English see Pema Kunsang (1993).

[85] Pema Kunsang (1993: 136-47).

[86] There are a number of Tibetan treatises that have dealt with the history of the Treasure tradition. See for instance Gu ru bkra shis's *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba's *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, bDud 'joms Rin po che's *Gangs ljongs rgyal bstan yongs rdzogs kyi phyi mo snga 'gyur rdo rje theg pa'i bstan pa rin po che ji ltar 'byung ba'i tshul dag cing gsal bar brjod pa lha dbang g.yul las rgyal ba'i rnga bo che'i sgra dbyangs* for a general overview and list of major *gter ston*. For specific monographic studies on *gter ma* see rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pai nyi ma's *gTer kyi rnam bshad* (translated by Tulku Thondup in *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*); 'Jam mngon kong sprul's *Zab mo'i gter dang gter ston grub thob ji ltar byon pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus bkod pa rin chen baidurya'i phreng ba*, which provides biographies of the major *gter ston*; and 'Ju mi pham's *gTer ston brtag pa chu dwangs nor bu*. Among the current Tibetan scholars in China, rGya ye bKra shis phun tshogs (1997) is worth mentioning for his analysis of the *gter ma* literature.

bSam yas monastery.[87] These two events marked not only the beginning of the development of the first communities of Buddhist practitioners, but also the mapping of a sacred geographic landscape connected with Padmasambhava's numerous journeys across the land. The appearance of Treasures is linked to the teachings and instructions allegedly delivered by Padmasambhava to his closest disciples in Tibet. The twenty-five main disciples of Padmasambhava, or "the Lord (Padmasambhava) and his twenty-five subjects" (*rje 'bangs nyer lnga*) as they are commonly referred to in Tibetan rNying ma literature, were those devotees who received teachings directly from him and participated in the early transmission of the Treasure teachings in Tibet.[88]

How were these teachings transmitted and concealed? Tulku Thondup and Janet Gyatso remind us that the way Padmasambhava transmitted his Treasure teachings included three phases.[89] First, Padmasambhava apparently imparted teachings on various aspects of Tantric practices. During this transmission, Padmasambhava uttered specific aspirations concerning the future appearance of the teachings. This transmission is known as the "aspiration initiation" (*smon lam dbang bskur*) and is connected with a Treasure revealer's own commitment to reveal the received teachings in his future rebirth. Therefore, the teachings are transmitted and maintained in the awakened minds (*rig pa*) of Padmasambhava's appointed disciples. Then, using his psychic powers in a special transmission method called the "mind-mandate transmission" or "transmission seal" (*gtad rgya*), Padmasambhava entrusted or sealed (*rgya btab*) the teachings so that they would remain unchanged until revealed.

Second, during the transmission, Padmasambhava strengthened the teachings with an appropriate "prophecy of the revelation" (*bka' bab lung bstan*). In such prophetic statements, the name of the Treasure revealer, place of birth and sometimes the name of his/her parents and other conditions for revelation were predicted, often in detail. Within such a procedure, the text

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[87] *sLob dpon padma'i rnam thar zangs gling* also known as the *bKa' thang zangs gling ma*, a text revealed by Nyag ral nyi ma 'od zer is another account of the life of Padmasambhava. For an analysis of various biographies of Padmasambhava see Vostrikov (1970), and Blondeau (1980: 45-52). The complete title of this work is *O rgyan gu ru'i padma 'byung gnas kyi skyes rabs rnam par thar pa rgyas par bkod pa padma bka'i thang yig* and various editions still exist in Tibet. For the existing editions of the *Padma bka' thang* see for instance Toussaint (1933: 497-498), Tucci (1949: 110-111, 114-115, 528, n. 196), Vostrikov (1970: 35-38), and Bischoff (1975; 1979). See also Martin (1997: 56). The *bKa' thang sde lnga* has also been produced in various editions and some studies of this work have appeared in Western scholarship. For studies of this text see among others Blondeau (1971, 1980, and 1987) and Sørensen (1991). On gTer ston O rgyan gling pa see Dargyay (1997: 123-128) and Dudjom Rinpoche (1991: 775-779).

[88] For a list of the *rje 'bangs nyer lnga* see Thondup (1986: 231, n.14) and Dudjom (1991: 535-36).

[89] rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma provides a description of this method of concealement in his *gTer kyi rnam bshad*. Thondup (1986: 67-68). See also Gyatso (1998: 154-61) for a detailed description of Padmasambhava's method of hiding Treasures.

containing information concerning its revealer becomes itself the legitimating device of its revealer.[90]

The third phase concerns Padmasambhava's entrustment of the teachings to the protection of deities and *ḍākinī*, an action that often involves encryption in symbolic script. The "entrustment of the *ḍākinī*" (*mkha' 'gro gtad rgya*) marks the final stage in the concealment of the teachings and is key to the claim of the mandate for its future revelation. Interestingly, these strategic techniques of imparting teachings and sealing them in material locales or human minds remind us not only of the "sealing" of important imperial edits and also Buddhist teachings in imperial Tibet, but also of the practice of concealing and revealing "ritual caskets" in medieval China.[91]

The actual transmission of the corpus of Treasures teachings (*gter chos*) rests upon the possibility of the Treasure revealer remembering the teachings and writing them down at the appropriate time. Those who reveal the teachings claim to be (re)incarnations of the eighth-century disciples of Padmasambhava's who were in his presence when he bestowed the teachings upon them with the aspiration (*smon lam*) that they would re-appear to benefit future beings (*ma 'ongs pa'i 'gro don du*). Therefore, Padmasambhava is believed to be the source of the Treasure teachings' transmission, and the actual bearers of his teachings, his emissaries (*pho nya*) are in charge of retrieving his hidden Treasures. Whereas the method of mind-mandate transmission lies at the heart of the tradition itself, the aspiration (*smon lam*) made by the master and sealed in the minds of his disciples is the fuse igniting the memory of the Treasure revealer. Treasure revealers are not only believed to be the reincarnations of Padmasambhava's disciples, but also the bearers of the original mind-mandate transmission for these particular teachings, which had been received in their previous life in the presence of Padmasambhava. Therefore, according to such a tradition, Treasure revealers remember the teachings received in the past and the places where these teachings were hidden (in the case of earth Treasures). Revealing the teachings from the pure state of their enlightened mind (*byang chub sems*), they thus understand the teachings' profound meaning and provide a literary form for their diffusion.

Although the act of concealing texts as elaborated by the rNying ma Treasure tradition happened largely according to organized strategies of transmission, the actual concealment of sacred artifacts and texts is a tactic employed by other religious believers as well. It is worth

[90] Gyatso (1998: 160).
[91] van Schaik (2007); Davidson (2005: 215). For the Chinese "ritual caskets" see Tsai (2006).

mentioning here that within the Bon tradition, for instance, some apologists claim that during the gradual assimilation of Buddhism in Tibet, Bon adherents were forced to hide a large amount of texts and other sacred items to protect them from sure destruction.[92] The Treasure tradition is therefore rooted in both rNying ma and Bon practices. Although Treasures are usually immediately associated with the rNying ma activities of revelation, the Bon pos also have a significant amount of teachings and practices revealed by Bon Treasure revealers.[93]

## *The Narrative in Today's Revelations*

Narratives about Padmasambhava and the way he concealed his teachings in Tibet continue to be produced today. Pivotal episodes related to the transmission of Buddhist teachings are revealed in current Treasure literature. An instance of this can be found in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's scriptural revelation, the *Rig pa gnad sprod byang chub sems gdams* (henceforth RPNP)[94] a text focused on the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) teachings. It is interesting to note that the inclusion of episodes putatively attibuted to Padmasambhava emphasizes the notion of Padmasambhava as the source of the Treasure tradition, and helps to keep the rNying ma teachings fresh and powerful across the ages.

The RPNP narrates a number of the most popularly known episodes from Padmasambhava's life. These mainly focus on his arrival in Tibet as depicted in his early years after his miraculous birth in Oḍḍiyāna (or Uḍḍyāna), his practices and the receptions of Buddhist teachings, and his life in India. Major attention is obviously devoted to Padmasambhava's arrival in Tibet on the invitation of the emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan, Padmasambhava's deeds in taming and

[92] sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag (1983: 145-146).
[93] For a study of Bon Treasure revealers and their Treasures teachings see Martin (1996, 2001) and Achard (2004).
[94] This text, *Instructions on the Enlightened Mind: An Explanation of the Essential Points of Awareness from Hūm chen kā ra's Mind Drops* (*Hūm chen kā ra'i thugs tig las rig pa gnad sprod byang chub sems gdams*) is a double, or re-rediscovered, Treasure (*yang gter*). In the colophon at the end of the manuscript (f. 11b), bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje declares that this text was first received and revealed by another *gter ston*, Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje (bDe chen 'gro 'dul nus ldan rtsal in the text), bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's root teacher (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*), also known as Kun bzang 'grol 'dul. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje himself has revealed again the text following a series of symbols (*brda*), pure visions (*dag snang*), and potential propensities (*bag chags*) left by his contact with his former teacher. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje compares these revealed teachings to the "wrathful indestructible laugh [caused by] the vision of the deity (rTa mgrin), which tames all the unrealized illusions." This teaching is associated with the practice of rDo rje'i me char (a manifestation of rTa mgrin, Skt. Hayagrīva). The RPNP is further interspersed with a series of prophetical statements attributed to Padmasambhava in the peculiar style of *gter ma* scriptures. These prophetic lines from the eighth century provide legitimacy to the re-discover the text, in this case bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje in the twenty-first century.

subjugating the opposing evil demons and Bon deities, activities related to the construction and consecration of the bSam yas monastery, and those apotropaic activities generally associated with Padmasambhava's conversion of the land to Buddhism such as consecration rituals and subjugation of demons. Generally, the RPNP conforms to older narratives of the early dissemination of the teachings (*bstan pa snga dar*) such as the PKT and meditation texts such as the popular *Rig pa ngo sprod gcer mthong rang grol* by the fourteenth-century visionary Karma gling pa. In its report of Padmasambhava's deeds connected with one of his major contributions to the early diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet, that of the establishment and construction of the bSam yas monastery, the RPNP emphasizes the role that mKhar chen Lady Ye shes mtsho rgyal is believed to have had in the process of hiding the teachings.[95]

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[95] *rGyal rabs lnga pa 'jam dbyangs rnam sprul mnga' bdag khri srong sde'u btsan dgung lo bcum [= bcu gsum] par rgyal srid bzung/ nyi shu par dam pa'i chos dar bar mdzad pa'i thugs bsam bskyed bas za hor gyi mkhan po shanta rakshi ta spyan drangs/ dge ba bcu dang khams bcu brgyad dang mthun pa chos chos gsungs/ bod kyi lha srin khros sdig blon rnams kyi [= kyis] 'di chos byas pas lan/ bod kyi mi ma yin rnams ma dga' ba yin zer/ bon sras rgyal po'i rigs la dam pa'i chos 'byung zhes pa'i lung brdzun ma bu yis bris nas rje'i phyag tu bab pa ma lags zhes gsol bas bho dhi satwa kho bo re zhig bas yul du 'gro/ bod kyi 'dre srin gdug pa can rnams 'dul ba la da lta sa'i steng tsam na mthu che ba sngags kyi mkhan po padma sam bha wa zhes bya ba yod/ de ngas spyan 'dren du 'ong btsan po rang yang re zhig 'tshal* **[f. 6a]** *gsungs pas/ pho nya myur pos mngag pa slob dpon gyi mkhyen te mang yul gung thang du yud tsam phebs nas mjal/ phyag rten gser rnams phul bas nga'i snang ba gser du yod gsungs nas phyogs su gtor te bod du gser 'byung ba'i rten 'brel mdzad pa dang lha 'dre rnams brngan par mdzad/ bod yul gyi lha srin sde brgyad thamd [= thams cad] btul/ brag dmar 'om bu'i[= bus][ gtibs pa'i] tshal du mnga' bdag dang mjal 'dzoms mdzad/ brag dmar mgrin bzang gi lha khang la rab gnas zhal gsol mdzad par lha sku rnams spyan drangs mchod pa'i yo byad thamd [= thams cad] rang sgra grags shing 'phel bar 'gyur/ sngar mkhan po byang chub sems dpa'i chos bshad pa la 'khu ba bon gyi lha klu mi srin thamd [= thams cad] kyi ming dang spyod tshul gnas la sogs par smras pa de rnams brdeg cing gzir bas dam 'og du bcug cing* **[f. 6b]** *chos la bkod/ des kyang ma thul ba rnams tshar bcad/ mal gro la sogs pa'i klu rnams 'dul zhing rgyal po dang grogs po byas lha khang bzhengs pa'i gser gye dre'u khal bcu'i phul/ mkhan pos kyang sa bcad [= dpyad] mdzad/ slob dpon chen po has po rir byon nas lha srin thamd [= thams cad] bka' 'og bsdus/ dpal gyi mgul las rta mgrin dregs pa zil gnon gyi tha tshig dang namkha' [= nam mkha'] la rdoe [= rdo rje]'i gar 'gros kyi sa gzhi byin gyis brlabs/ thig skud 'then par lcog ro bu chung lha bu sman gnyis ting nge 'dzin gyis bkug ste thig sna ba bya/ mkhan pos gsungs bzhin o danta pu ri'i gtsug lag khang la dpe byas te rmang gcig zhing lha 'dre mi yi rtsig pa mtho bar ri rab gling gzhi gling phran nyi zla lcags ri dang bcas pa mi 'gyur lhun gyis grub pa'i gtsug lag khang gling gsum* **[f. 7a]** *bcas rgya khyon 'di tsam lo lnga la grub/ slob dpon nyid kyis rab tu gnas pa mdzad pa'i tshe dbu rtse'i lha rnams dang phyi rol byon pa sogs cho 'phrul dang ngo mtshar bsam gyi mi khyab pa byung/ de yi tshe dpal bsam yas lhun gyis grub pa'i gtsug lag khang gi byang ngos bsam yas g.ya' ma ri'i rta mgrin phug nas yang gsang khro bo lha dgu dang khyad par dregs gshed rdoe [= rdo rje]'i me char gyi lha mi 'gro ba kun gyi mthong ba'i ngo mtshar dang bcas te rta mgrin gling gi lha khang du byon/ rgyal po chen po khri srong sde'u btsan gyi lha skal du babs/ khyad par du dhāki ye shes mtsho rgyal la ma 'ong [= 'ongs] pa'i lung dang dkar chags 'byung tshul sogs kyi zhal gdams zhus pa bzhin gnang ste lo rgyus gyi [= kyi] phreng mdzes mang po yod kyang dus khams dang brtun [= bstun] nas 'dir gab /sa ma ya.* RPNP, f. 5b-7a.

> During the fifth dynasty, the sovereign Khri srong lde'u btsan, emanation of [the Bodhisattva] Mañjuśri, took [the rule of] the empire (*rgyal srid*) when he was thirteen years old. Until he was twenty years old he generated a profound faith in the dissemination of the holy teachings [in Tibet], and therefore he invited the abbot Śantarakśita from Zahor, who taught the Dharma in accordance with the ten virtues and the eighteen realms. In response to this religious practitioner the gods, spirits, wrathful deities, wicked ministers of Tibet responded by declaring that the non-human beings (*mi ma yin rnams*) of Tibet were not pleased.

The RPNP ccontains some of the central narrative features that traditionally constitute the architecture of the Treasure tradition as it was disseminated through the PKT. These features are the construction of the bSam yas temple and the seminal role of emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan, Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal who are instrumental in the concealment (*gab*) of the teachings. The scenario is framed within the "dispositions of the time and place" (*dus khams dang bstun*) according to which the immediate future was seen as pernicious to the correct and safe diffusion of the teachings. Ye shes mtsho rgyal, therefore, is given a prominent role in the transmission of the Treasures.[96]

Ye shes mtsho rgyal was a Tibetan woman, apparently of noble lineage, whose relationship with Padmasambhava was to play a pivotal role in his life in the Treasure tradition

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Bon sras proclaimed that a person had written false scriptures about the history of the holy Dharma for the royal family and they had not fallen in the hands of the lord. [Disturbed by these claims, the abbot] Bodhisattva [alias Śantarakśita] announced [to the emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan]: "I am off to Nepal for a while. To convert the malicious demons of Tibet, there is nowadays a master of powerful spells on the earth. His name is Padmasambhava and I request you invite him to come temporarily."

Envoys were immediately dispatched, but knowing about this plan, the master [Padmasambhava] arrived promptly at Mang yul Gung thang and met [the enoys there]. As soon as these offered him presents in gold, he proclaimed: "My appearance is gold!" And throwing [the gold] everywhere he generated auspicious circumstances for the origin of gold in Tibet and gave it to the gods and demons.

He tamed the eight classes of the deities and demons, and met the sovereign [Khri srong lde'u btsan] at Red Rock Dense Tamarisk Forest. At the temple in Brag dmar mgrin bzang [residence of the emperor] he performed a consecration ritual and thus invoking the deities all the offering substances resonated greatly. [Padmasambhava] called out the names, the behavior, and the residences of all the Bon deities, *nāga*, humans, and demons that insulted the teachings previously taught by the abbot Bodhisattva, beat them up, tormented them, and put them under oath, establishing them in the Dharma. Even those [deities that remained] untamed were subjugated. Having tamed the *nāgas*, such as Mal gro [the king of *nāgas*], [Padmsambhava] befriended the emperor and offered ten mule loads of gold for the erection of the temple and the abbot [Bodhisattva] performed geomantic [rituals] too.

Once arrived on Mount Has po, the great master gathered all the deities and demons under [his] command. On the slope [in front of the] glorious [temple] he blessed the oath [taken] by rTa mgrin dregs pa sil gnon and performed a Vajra dance in the sky. Then pulling out a thread, lCog ro bu chung summoned two young deities and by [power of] contemplation, he made them work as construction workers.

According to the instructions of the abbot, the foundations of the [temple] were laid down using the Ōtantapuri temple as a model. An imperishable and spontaneous temple was completed in five years that was the size of three locations [representing] the building of gods, demons, and human beings. The upper part represented Mt. Meru [surrounded by] the four continents and the [eight] small continents, with the sun and the moon on the top and iron mountains all around.

When the master [Padmasambhava] was performing the consecration ritual, the gods of the central temple went outside and extraordinary and inconceivable miracles manifested. At that moment [coming] from the rTa mgrin cave on Mount g.Ya' ma in bSam yas on the northern side of the spontaneously self perfected temple of the glorious bSam yas, the utmost secret nine wrathful deities [related to rTa mgrin] made themselves visible to the human beings, in particular the haughty deity [rTa mgrin] rDo rje me char and reached the temple rTa mgrin gling thus becoming destined deities to the great emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan.

In particular [Padmasambhava] gave the *ḍākinī* Ye shes mtsho rgyal oral instructions concerning future scriptures (*lung*) and catalogues (*dkar chags*), and so forth. And even though there are many exquisite garlands of this history, the ones concealed here in are in accordance with time and space/ Sa ma ya /

[96] Dowman (1996 :138-140).

and in the history of the early translation period as claimed by the rNying ma school.[97] Jacoby has recently observed that the paradigmatic figure of Ye shes mtsho rgyal as represented in her biographies is often a model for auto/biographical voices of female Tantric practitioners, in this case of the Treasure revealer Sera mkha' 'gro (1892-1940).[98] She also points out that Ye shes mtsho rgyal is a role model not only in the biographical writings of pre-modern Tibetan female religious figures, but also in the inspired lifestyles of female Treasure revealers in present-day Tibet, such as the late Tāre lha mo (1938-2002) and her consort Nam sprul 'jigs med phun tshogs.[99] In addition to Ye shes mtsho rgyal, some other well-known religious figures took major roles in concealing Treasures such as the eighth-century emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan and his son Mu khri btsan po as well as early prominent scholars and practitioners such as gNubs Nam mkha'i snying po, Vairocana (Bai ro tsa na), sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms, and gNubs sangs rgyas ye shes.

Although the details of Padmasambhava's life are shrouded in mystery, the mytho-historical events of his life are continually maintained and re-introduced through the work of revelation. Thus, the Treasure revelation tradition fulfils two ambitious aims: it regenerates faith and devotion in Treasure revealers and the entire rNying ma tradition, and it fosters devotion to the soteriological power of the teachings described in the Treasure scriptures, thus rejuvinating the tradition.

In addition to the episodes appearing in revealed texts such as the RPNP, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has composed a history of the early translation period (*snga 'gyur*) focusing on the

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[97] The rNying ma tradition holds that Guru Padmasambhava had five principal consorts. The Tibetan Ye shes mtsho rgyal, princess Mandāravā from Za hor, the Nepalese princess Śākyadevī, KalaSiddhi from Nepal, and bKra shis spyi 'dren from Mon. See Thondup (1984: 145-149). However the three most generally recognized consorts of Padmasambhava are princess Mandāravā, princess Śākyadevī, and princess mKhar chen bza' Ye shes mtsho rgyal. Mention of these consorts can be found in the short biography of Padmasambhava by 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas contained in his TTGT (f. 6b-14b), and respectively at f. 9a, 10b, and 13a.
The figure of Ye shes mtsho rgyal is found in particular in the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud Tantric practices where she is closely associated with the deity Vajrayoginī/Vajravārāhī. See English (2002: xxv-xxvi). Ye shes mtsho rgyal has also provided an idealized feminine model in Tantric Buddhism. The feminine role in Tantric practices of (intimate) union is crucial to advanced yoga practices in many schools of Tibetan Buddhism such as inner heat *yoga* (*gtum mo*) and inner fire offerings (*sbyin sregs*). Considered to be the union of female/wisdom and male/compassion, the Buddhist Tantric imagery promotes idealized forms of the sexual union between male and female religious partners that symbolizes completion via an intimate Tantric relationship where one partner complements the other in the quest for enlightenment. For a study of consort practices in Buddhism see, for instance, Jacoby (2007), Dalton (2004), and Shaw (1994: 140-78).
[98] There are many biographies of Ye shes mtsho rgyal circulating in Tibet today. A very popular one is the *Bod kyi rgyal mo ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi mdzad tshul rnam par thar pa gab pa mngon byung rgyud mangs dri za'i glu 'phreng* discovered by the Treasure revealer sTag sham nus ldan rdo rje (1655-?). This has been translated in various editions. See Tarthang Tulku (1983), Dowman (1984), and Padmakara (2002).
[99] Jacoby (2007: 357-61).

activities of Padmasambhava and the concealment of his teachings. This text is the *A Crystal Mirror of Profound Meaning and Perfect Essence* (*Don zab gnad smin shel dkar me long* (henceforth DGSM).[100] In the short colophon to the text (f. 14a) the author bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, under his Sanskrit name Prabhāsvara vajra, writes that many of the sources employed for his work have been:

> drawn on writings (*gsung dpe*) of the ancestral saints of the rNying ma tradition of the Secret Mantra of the Close Transmission, and from the lives (*rnam thar*) of most of the superior human beings (*skyes mchog gang zag*) of Tibet, Treasure revealers, saints, and Awareness-Holders who have realized the *yoga* of the *Vajrayāna* of the Secret Mantra and who continue the tradition of the teachings of the Earlier Translations of many great saints of India of the time, and from the origins and history of the Profound Treasures of the great saint Padmasambhava."[101]

The latter most probably refers to Dudjom Rinpoche's (bDud ’joms ’jigs bral ye shes rdo rje) section on the "history of the profound Treasures of the very secret close transmission" (*shin tu zab pa nye brgyud gter ma'i lo rgyus*), which is in his monumental work *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*.[102] In his DGSM, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje has included a significant amount of quotes from this work, which is  one of the most well-known recently written versions of the history of the Treasure tradition in Tibet, attesting, therefore, for the respect it attracts.[103] Other rNying ma histories likely used for the production of the DGSM are the *Gu bkra'i chos ’byung* and the *gTer bton brgya tsa*, both widely employed by various Tibetan doxographers in the compilations of their works. The fact that a contemporary Treasure revealer and Buddhist teacher such as bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje refers so heavily to, and draws consistently on, existing written sources in the compilation of his own work is emblematic of the high consideration that the works mentioned above still receive today as sources of information, knowedge, and legitimacy.

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje claims that the DGSM:

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[100] The title on the margin of the DGSM reads *snga ’gyur*, and this is also the name by which this text is better known among the members of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje's community. According to the colophon, it has been composed in 1990 while the *gter ston* was residing at one of his hermitages in northeastern Kham. Though bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje himself considers this text as a composition, his followers like to consider it a revealed mind Treasure.

[101] DGSM, f. 14a

[102] For an English translation see Dudjom (1991).

[103] The Tibetan edition I used for my analysis is the *History of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism Gangs ljongs ryal bstan yongs rdzogs kyi phyi mo snga ’gyur rdo rje theg pa'i bstan pa rin po che ji ltar byung ba'i tshul dag cing gsal bar brjod pa lha dbang g.yul las rgyal ba'i rnga bo che'i sgra dbyangs* (1993), also known as *bDud ’joms chos ’byung*.

is a burning lamp clearing up the darkness, presented for the benefit of the fortunate human beings, and a method to remove the obscuration [caused by] the disputes of future generations.[104]

These lines announce the scope of the work and immediately set us in the specific sphere of the Tibetan Treasure tradition. Although the DGSM is not a Treasure, the purpose of its production seems to be an overt attempt to reaffirm the validity of the Treasure revelation as a system of authentic transmission of Buddhist teachings.

In terms of content, the work is first of all a glorification of the figure of Padmasambhava and of his direct incarnate disciples, the Treasure revealers (*gter ston*). In the DGSM these are often referred to as the fortunate individuals (*skal ldan skyes bu*), who had the good fortune to be close to him and receive and practice the Buddhist teachings.[105] Because of this circumstance these incarnate people are authorized to reveal teachings they claim to have received from their teacher in the past and to teach these revealed doctrines in the present. The pivotal role of Padmasambhava is therefore fundamental to the understanding of the tradition of the Treasure transmission and the mechanisms that raise issues of identity and self-representation in Tibet.

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has felt the need to write this work at a crucial point of his career. As we will see in more detail in the following chapters, in the past twenty years Treasure revelation has been visible and successful particularly in eastern Tibet where many Treasure revealers like bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje are currently active and a few also lead religious communities, thus being among the most active leaders of the current religious revitalization. As we will see in the following chapter, the early 1980s saw a consistent shift in the PRC's attitude towards religious and ethnic issues. After a more liberal policy began to be applied in China, including the TAR and other regions of Tibetan culture, religious practices were no longer continually repressed, allowing local people to re-embrace more or less openly their own social customs and manifest expressions of religious belief. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje wrote his history of Padmasambhava and his Treasures to accentuate his connection with the imperial golden age of Buddhism in Tibet and to re-enact this legacy in post-Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) Tibet. By this enterprise he has re-established a devotion-based relationship with his devotees who had been morally and spiritually tormented during the chaotic years of the past included those of the Cultural Revolution.

[104] DGSM, f. 1a.
[105] DGSM, f. 1a, 3a, 4b.

A number of accounts, chronicles, and histories on both Padmasambhava and Treasure revealers have appeared in Tibet over the centuries.[106] Why did bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje compose a new one? I think that a plausible answer to such a question is that in the typical fashion of many revealers of the past this "new" history is a conscious effort to foster devotees' faith in him as Treasure revealer and therefore as a realized practitioner worth worshiping and following.[107] These goals are achieved to the degree that past connections, karmic relationships, and incarnation of one of Padmasambhava's direct disciples together with the revealing of Treasures have already been firmly established as normative components of legitimate Treasure revelation. In other words, when the reader learns about these "fortunate beings," about their important value and role in the revival and renewal of Padmasambhava's teachings, and knowing about bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal achievements in the retrieving of material and mental Treasures, s/he will glorify the character of the history as the direct recipient of that tradition. Pragmatically speaking, being a tribute to the Treasure revealers, the DGSM is therefore a glorification of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje himself.

## ***Treasure Politics: Need for Concealment or Need for Revelation?***

> It is written in the *bDud-rtsi'i 'byung-ba rtsa-ba'i rgyud*:
> 'When my Doctrine has waned,
> the Dharma will be like the milk of the marketplace:
> mixed with the bad, it is not good when drunk.'
> Thus, in each valley a discoverer of treasure will be seen,
> in each province a magician eager for glory,
> an assassin of the Dharma, hands reddened with blood,
> a squanderer of Scriptures of clear revelation, as if they were false
> treasures.[108]

Some traditional Tibetan doxographies and hagiographies such at the one above stress the necessity for "hiding" (*sbas*) the teachings and religious artifacts. O rgyan gling pa in the PKT reports that there will be more individuals voicing Treasure revelation at a time when the Buddhist teachings will be diluted and threatened of corruption. The maintainance of pure and

[106] Please see the Selected Bibliography at the end of the volume.
[107] As Janet Gyatso suggests (1986:13) the historical section of Treasures is a means to present evidence and proof that the Treasures are authentic Buddhist scriptures. Their main purpose is thus to engender confidence (*nges shes bskyes pa*) in the readers and devotees. These texts provide a selection of events and stories from the Treasures' lives but also a series of signs (*rtags*), and exemplary forms (*dpe byad*) in order for followers to become confident in the treasures themselves.
[108] PKT, pp. 586-87. This translation is from Yeshes Tsogyal (1978: 642).

uncorrupted teachings is clearly a pivotal element in the narrative of Padmasambhava's Buddhist teaching-concealing activities in Tibet. Tulku Thondup gives four reasons why Treasures appeared to protect the teachings, to maintain the purity of the instructions, to preserve their blessing power, and to keep the lineage closely linked with Padmasambhava.[109] It is especially the latter reason that is often cited in colophons of Treasures scriptures as to why they have been hidden. This is true also for contemporary Treasures revealers. In the colophon of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's *Don zab gnad smin shel dkar me long* (*The Crystal Mirror of Profound and Effective Meaning*), an account of the Treasure tradition, we read:

> The religious scriptures of my teachings you shall hide
> From [my] mind to Treasures!
> Or else, put them in the heart of the earth.
> This way, those who are not Buddhist will surely be confused,
> And the meaning will be confounded.
> Therefore, the flow [of the teachings] will not be interrupted.[110]

In these words we read one major reason behind the revelation of scriptures: the preoccupation to maintain the original Tantric Buddhist teachings originating from the early translation period pure and uninterrupted.

Davidson has recently provided valuable insights into the nebulous decades between the collapse of the royal era and the beginning of the "Tibetan renaissance."[111] In the tenth century, the period that generally marks the beginning of the second major diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet (*phyi dar*), religious communities were reconstituted through the efforts of a few monks who fled to the Western regions of Tibet first and then later moved to Eastern Tibet. These communities and individuals, mostly loyal to the empire and interested in regaining religious authority and control, had to gradually reorganize both their religious world as well as their relationship with the laity and the local aristocratic clans (*sger pa*). The idea was to establish a common ground from which to regenerate Buddhist vitality and restore monastic activities. Buddhist teachings were probably given to quite limited groups of practitioners scattered over

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[109] Thondup (1986: 62).

[110] *nga yi bstan pa'i chos kyi gzhung /*
*thugs nas thugs kyi gter du sbos /*
*yang na sa yi snying por bya /*
*ci phyir mu stegs can mgo rgod /*
*des don dkrug par 'gyur ta re /*
*de phyir chu klung rgyun mi gcod /* DGSM (f. 2b).

[111] Davidson (2005).

the territory, especially in small kingdoms in the eastern and western parts of the land.[112] This state of affairs lasted until the beginning of the eleventh century when the social and cultural atmosphere began a slow but intense revival.

Following the disintegration of the royal dynastic empire in the mid-ninth century, Tibet experienced dramatic socio-political instability and decentralization. Political ferment brought inner conflicts between clans and rebellions and struggles for power were found throughout Tibet.[113] This atmosphere in Tibet at the turn of the millennium was detrimental to the well-being of Buddhism, which had previously relied on state support.[114] Despite the significant impoverishment in religious infrastructure, a number of Buddhist practices, rituals, and meditation were nevertheless kept alive eventually allowing some degree of revival and maintenance. Some religious practice and monastic lineages survived especially thanks to the works of translators and aristocratic patrons who vowed to reproduce in Tibetan the manumental Indian Buddhist literature. Religious personalities of the time such as bLa chen dgongs pa rab gsal, kLu med tshul ’khrims shes rab, and the well-known Rin chen bzang po revitalized Buddhism in the tenth century.[115]

At the dawn of the tenth- to eleventh-century Tibetan Buddhist renaissance the translation and dissemination of Indic literary material became the legitimate standard for the new Buddhist movement, whereas those who followed earlier translations (*snga ’gyur*) of Buddhist teachings faced considerable challenges to the legitimacy of their liturgies and practices. Davidson has observed that a renaissance of Buddhism took place in the first two centuries of the new millennium that updated the socio-religious order in a way that incorporated new styles of

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[112] The kingdoms in western Tibet that arose in the aftermath of the decline of the dynastic empire in central Tibet grew especially in the territories around Mount Kailāsh and in those bordering India and Nepal. Small political entities such as mNga’ ris, Gu ge, and sPu rangs emerged under the rule of local chieftains. It was under the patronage of these aristocratic elites and their scholarly support that religious renaissance slowly developed.

[113] Davidson (2005) has recently discussed this period in detail.

[114] Karmay (1988: 9-10).

[115] According to the *Thu’u bkwan grub mtha’* (1984: 51-52), in the period after the decline of Buddhism due to gLang dar ma (*gLang dar mas bstan pa bsnubs pa’i dus*), monastic lineages and the diffusion of Buddhism, especially the *Vinaya* vows (*sdom pa*) were preserved by three scholars (*mkhas pa mi gsum*) who lived at the meditation centre (*sgrom grwa*) of Chu bo ri in dBu. Two of these were bLa chen po dGongs pa rab gsal (892-975) and kLu mes tshul khrims shes rab. These monks gave the vows to ten people who then re-established religious centers in central areas of dBu btsang and they themselves spread the *Vinaya* vows (*sdom pa spel*), reviving the Buddhist doctrine (*gsang rgyas kyi bstan pa gsos pa*). The third person in question is Rin chen bzang po, the translator from sTod nga’ ri in western Tibet, who after having set out for India in search for Indian scholars, translated many Buddhist texts into Tibetan. See mKhas btsun bzang po (1973: vol.3, 128-33). See also Tucci (1998: 259), and Samuel (1993: 457-58) for discussions on dGongs pa rab gsal.

leadership, order, and religious status largely structured on aristocratic families and clans.[116] The rNying ma adherents strongly believed they represented the true spirit of early Buddhism in Tibet, and the closest connection to the glorious imperial age of Tibet (up to the ninth century) and the repositories of those Tantric traditions developed at that time.[117] However, the newly formed schools critiqued the ancient forms of Buddhist practices on the grounds that their scriptures were original compositions instead of Indic translations of Tantric material and because they often included dubious practices such as union (*sbyor ba*) and liberation (*sgrol ba*).[118]

It is in such a socio-political and religious scenario, characterized by the emergence of newly organized forms of religious groups, Buddhist education and monasticism, that the Tantric communities adhering to the *snga 'gyur*, or "early translation" practices and scriptures began to revitalize their own sense of identity and develop forms of textual legitimacy and authenticity. I argue that in the contemporary context, the same strategy of legitimacy has been applied by the "new" revelations. I interpret this style of revelations as attempts to reappropriate power and authority that had been denied to the Tibetan believers during the decades of assimilation and destruction from the 1950s to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. It is my sense that just like in the past when the Treasure revelation tradition was born, it is the competing and compelling forces at work during a particularly critical time that inspire some rNying ma figures to draw inspiration from visions and revelations to re-authenticate, preserve, and disseminate their practices in order to ensure their ongoing power and attractiveness to the faithful.

## *Eschatology and Liberation: Treasure Revelation in the Shaping of rNying ma Identity*

The dramatic shift of interests in the eleventh century Tibetan renaissance from a heterodox ancient practice advanced by adherents to the early translations (*snga 'gyur*) to a more orthodox

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[116] Davidson (2006) discusses his theories in various parts of his book. See for instance Chapter VII (244-75). Davidson's (2006: 267-74) comments are interesting in that he observes that influences in the eleventh century where not unilateral. While on the one hand early monastic institutions and religious communities tried to use aristocratic clan structure as a model for their patterns of inheritance and transmission of authority, on the other hand aristocratic families began to employ religious discourses in the attempt to develop their own clan mythology thus combining both Tibetan knowledge and Buddhist tradition.

[117] Germano (1994).

[118] Germano (1994: 230-232).

Indic-based liturgy endorsed by the later, or new, translation (*phyi 'gyur, gsar 'gyur*) schools triggered an immediate response by some contemporary exponents of the rNying ma school. Since the beginning of rNying ma movements between the ninth and eleventh centuries, two phenomena had begun to emerge: religious charisma and canonical authority.

The concept of "charisma" has been studied, analyzed, and discussed by many eminent scholars in the twentieth century such as Max Weber and Bryan R. Wilson among others.[119] In their view, charisma, seen in a sociological context, is often supernatural in quality and is appreciated by a portion of a society.[120] For Weber, charisma was a gift of grace, and he identified it with a supernatural and superhuman quality which includes exceptional powers which set the individual apart from ordinary people of a given society.[121] He also suggested that charisma is not a personality attribute, nor a psychological characteristic. Rather, it is a social recognition of a claim to supernatural power.[122] In his analysis of charisma as existing in pre-modern societies, Wilson goes even further in identifying "the charismatic claimant is, of necessity, a claimant to essentially supernatural power, for within these cultures everything is conceived in at least magico-religious terms: thus, even leaders who do not themselves assume a religious role claim supernatural power, whether magical or mystical."[123] Therefore for Wilson, charisma, the attraction of faith in man, has much to do with myth and occurs only where a supernatural source has been imputed.[124]

The pressure of external political events such as the menace of foreign (Mongol) rule, social instability, the necessity of a unified land under a common leadership, the growth of anxieties about the future of Buddhism, and the threat of lineage extinction posed by the emergence of new lineages during the *phyi 'gyur* motivated *snga 'gyur* communities to look for alternative devices to provide authenticity to their doctrines.[125] Davidson has observed that in the

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[119] Weber (1947, 1964, 1968); Wilson (1975).
[120] Wilson (1975: 7-9).
[121] Weber (1947: 329).
[122] Weber (1964: 2).
[123] Wilson (1975: vii).
[124] Wilson (1975: ix-x).
[125] In his analysis of the two *gter ma* scriptures, *Padma bka' thang* and *bKa' thang sde lnga*, Tucci (1949: 112) explained that under the Mongol invasions and rule in the thirteenth century the emergence of *gter ma* revelation can be seen as "a sign of the yearning for a restoration of ancient times, a proof of national revival." This point was later developed by Dreyfus (1998), but heavily criticized by Blondeau (2001). As for the issue on charisma I follow primarily the theories of charisma as advanced by Wilson in his study (1975). Wilson remarks that one of the primary conditions for the emergence of charisma and charismatic leadership is a state of social malaise. Wilson (1975: 94-100). See also Davidson's argument for the explanation of the use of *gter ma* revelation as a form of authentication of Tantric scriptures (2005: 228).

twelfth century Tibetans were still struggling with their literary material, and a significant amount of indigenous compositions produced during the previous two centuries failed to be considered authentic and equivalent to those of Indian origin.[126]

Probably from the eleventh century, Treasure revealers began to be recognized for their charismatic qualities. They were known to have magical powers and clairvoyance, but also authority, presence, and knowledge. These are based on the Treasure revealer's ability to produce textual, ritual, and visual/iconographic material in a form that could consolidate the identity of his religious group. Treasure revealers' charisma was a stabilizing factor for the group's identity and one that served as their theological, ritual, and moral *modus operandi*.

One of the most intriguing issues concerning the Tibetan Treasure tradition is the leading role that laymen and often householders occupy in the phenomenon. The close relationship between sexuality and contemplative Tantric yogic exercises and their importance for discovering and revealing *gter* teachings appear to privilege non-celibate Tantric virtuosi rather than monks bound by monastic vows.[127] Indeed most Treasure revealers are non-celibate Tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*) whose pedigree is predominantly nonmonastic and who use a mode of contemplation based less on scholastic and philosophical expertise.

As von Stietencron observes in a recent work, charisma and canon are closely interconnected factors in creating and perpetuating religious communities. He posits that a religious community's collective identity is linked to its charismatic leader who is often the origin of the community's existence. Change and legitimacy are often prerequisites for a community's survival. It is through change that a community updates its religion and it is through "fresh charisma" that it generates renewed enthusiasm.[128] If we set the rNying ma tradition within von Stietencron's paradigm, the Treasure revealers fit very well into the pattern of charismatic persons in their quest for canonicity and legitimization. From the outset of the ancient (*rnying ma*) tradition's assertions of its identity against the backdrop of the modernist (*gsar ma*) trends of the new schools in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, charisma and charismatic authority were indeed successful means to rejuvenate religious practices and refresh rituals. Our understanding of the social structure of religious groupings that proliferated during the early stages of Buddhist development in Tibet in the tenth and eleventh centuries is only

[126] Davidson (2005: 324).
[127] Thondup (1990:154).
[128] von Stietencron (2001: 31-32).

beginning. However, we can surmise that small groups and confined communities formed the base of this religious world. These groupings were likely led by non-celibate Tantric leaders or monks. Since the sectarian diversification of Buddhist schools and their literature developed in Tibet only after the eleventh century, I believe that to understand the dynamics of these early communities and their charismatic leaders in Tibetan religious history, we should focus our attention especially on literary material produced between the eleventh and the fourteenth century.

The manner of transmission of Buddhist teachings is one of the fundamental sources of religious authority. For the rNying ma adherents, after the oral transmission (*bka' ma*) of the words of the Buddha, *gter ma* teachings and the Treasure revealers as transmitters of the teachings are respectively the source and the bearers of authority. After the consolidation of regional centers of religious and political power that followed the Buddhist movements of the early eleventh century, the necessity for stability and political power forced the rNying ma communities to claim legitimacy for their practices. The rNying ma needed to prove the spiritual legitimacy of their literary corpus in order to maintain their religious authority. Early Buddhist practitioners most likely gathered around non-celibate Tantric, in most cases married, teachers (*mantrin*, *sngags pa*), instead of forming large monastic organizations.[129] This further development of Tibetan Buddhism is associated with the gradual formation of religious entities and sectarian identities backed by clan-based power that resulted in a stronger emphasis on monastic and ethical codes, as seen in the emergence of the bKa' gdams, Sa skya, and bKa' brgyud communities in the late eleventh and twenfth century.[130] Next to ritual functions, scholasticism and discipline soon became the focus of monastic institutions.[131]

Therefore, according to the tradition, concealment and revelation are needed to protect Padmasambhava's teachings from being adulterated and misunderstood. Another central feature contained in Treasure scriptures is the eschatological message they evocate. Most Treasure literature is based on the concept of a degenerate age (*snyigs dus*) and the assumption that the Treasures will be revealed in times of need when they can help liberate people. One of the eschatological notions that pervade Treasure scriptures is the immanent presence of negative forces that undermine and threaten the very existence of Buddhism. The work of the Treasure

[129] Tucci (1949: 88).
[130] Davidson (2005: 244-322).
[131] Davidson (2005: 10-11).

revealer is to reveal the proper liberating resource, in the form of material objects empowered with the potency of Padmasambhava’s personal touch or the series of liturgies and practices attributed to him for the welfare of both Buddhism and its followers.

> Emaho, You who were born from a Lotus, supreme among the *Nirmāṇakāya*, protector of the living beings,
> Here in this Tibet of mine, wild and snow-capped,
> [Where] valleys and ravines seem vessels of weapons,
> Ministers are evil [and belong to] the red-faced race of the ogress.
> They don’t have a pure heart and perform numerous negative deeds.
> Moved by compassion you [Padmasambhava] have bestowed teachings and instructions,
> And concealed many precious Treasures for the benefit of future generations,
> And in the future Treasure revealers will appear.[132]

This short passage from the PKT illustrates one of the major purposes of the concealment of Treasures, that of benefiting future generations who will live in times of turmoil and spiritual aridity while being persecuted by malignant agencies and unfortunate circumstances.

The term *snyigs dus* populates many of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s writings, both his personal compositions and his revealed scriptures. This comes as no surprise because the rhetoric of a degenerate age pervading this lifetime underlines the basic notion of Treasures, which are believed to expound those ritual practices, yogic techniques, and meditation systems that are suitable to the spiritual needs of our contemporary age. In his autobiography, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje writes:

> Then, holy beings and wise men
> Of the great lands of Nepal, Tibet, and Khams,
> Paid respectful homage to me and praised me as Padma[sambava]’s messenger.
> [Henceforth] I retrieved various Treasures as sacred objects, precious stones, and artifacts.
> I am confident that some of the ordinary common people will benefit from such a connection,
> And virtuous people might cleanse their defilements for the next life.
> I thus sufficiently removed the decrepitude of the degenerated age from this intermediate era.[133]

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[132] *e ma ho /*
*sprul sku’i mchog gyur ’gro mgon padma ’byung /*
*bdag gi bod yul mtha’ ’khob kha ba can /*
*gtsong rong grog po mtshon cha gzigs pa ’dra /*
*ma rungs blon po gdong dmar srin po’i rigs /*
*dkar po’i sems med sdig spyod sems can mang /*
*phyi rabs don du rin chen gter mang sbas /*
*ma ‘ongs don du gter ston mang ’byung na /*
(PKT, 1987: 582-583). This translation is mine. Please see also Toussaint (1933), and Dharma Publishing (1978) for English translations of the text.

[133] *dam pa’i skyes bu rnams dang mig ldan bus /*

In the passage above it is important to notice that being a Treasure revealer, or to use the author's words "Padmasambhava's messenger," empowers the individual with the potency of removing obstacles in order to alleviate the spiritual decay brought about by the current times. Such a conviction is also clearly expressed in other writings. In his *Don zab gnad smin shel dkar me long* (A Crystal Mirror of Profound Meaning and Perfect Essence), for instance, a mytho-historical narrative of the early translation period specifically focusing on Padmasambhava and his Treasure hiding activities, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje again employs the rhetoric of the degenerate age to provide a basis for the existence of Treasures and their revealers. Paraphrasing a verse from Ratna gling pa's *Tshe bcu bskul thabs*, he writes:

> However, in the degenerated age, Treasures will guide most practitioners.
> And being profound, complete, unobscured, and vast
> Each instruction will certainly liberate some human beings.
> Thus, oh fortunate ascetic trainees, whose karma has awakened,
> If you remember death, [then] practice the Treasure teachings,
> Oh [my] followers, you will attain enlightenment in one lifetime
> And in the degenerated age, all the fortunate ones who are devoted to the Treasures
> Are those who currently envision the Guru's image and express their aspiration.
> Since you are all karmically fortunate, cultivate happiness!
> These words of mine are more rare than gold or jewels.[134]

In this passage, the Treasures doctrines are portrayed as guidance for the devoted practitioners who live in the degenerate age, and their instructions are believed to provide liberation to those who experience them. In another of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's writings, *Hūm chen kā ra'i thugs tig las rig pa gnad sprod byang chub sems gdams* (Instructions on the Enlightened Mind: An Explanation of the Essential Points of Awareness from Hūm chen kā ra's Mind Drops), the imminence of the degenerate age is seen as analogous to "the eclipse of light over the entire territory of the Tibetan empire below the sun."[135]

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*padma'i pho nya bsnags brjod spyi bor bskul /*
*chos nor rdzas kyi gter kha sna tshogs drangs /*
*skal dman phal pa'i 'gro rnams re 'ga' las /*
*'brel tshad don ldan 'di bde'i nges shes thob /*
*rnam dkar can rnams phyi ma'i sgrib byang brnyed /*
*dus snyigs rgud pa'i bar bskal ldang ba sel /*

DDZG, f. fb-8b.

[134] DGSM, f. 3a. Quoted in bDud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje's *Chos 'byung* (1996: 413). For the English translation of this passage see also Dujoms (1991: 744-45).

[135] RPNP, f. 10b.

The emphasis on a degenerate age and the response of Treasure revelations to the pressure of modernity bears a strong similarity to the rhetoric of the period of darkness and decline that characterized early Treasures revelation in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.[136] Whereas the ninth-century collapse of the Tibetan empire and the central authority were caused by domestic factors, in the twentieth century Tibetans faced new challenges due to external forces and colonial domination by the PRC. In both cases, the religious congregation has been deeply affected, abandoned religious structures rapidly went into decay, and formal religious education and instruction languished. Thus it is not difficult to understand how the ideology of degenerate age reverberates today in the writings of contemporary Treasure revealers such as bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. The rhetoric of a degenerate age (*snyigs dus*) caused by a phase of decline of the Buddhist doctrine under internal and/or external forces is emphasized in most Treasure narratives. I argue that Treasure revealers draw on this rhetoric in order to reinforce their authority in the present day as revitalizers of the Buddhist doctrine who have the power to counter its decline.[137]

The first Treasure revealers contributed to the creation of a climate of sectarian identity via the dissemination of doctrines "revealed" from hidden places. Additionally, in some cases, as Giuseppe Tucci suggests, Treasures also gave voice to Tibetans' new nationalistic pride by establishing a sense of political and religious self-awareness.[138] Similarly, twentieth-century Treasures re-evaluate and re-propose such a discourse integrating it into the new socio-historical circumstances.

### *Authentic Revealers or Authentic Revelations?*

Despite their strong ideological power and long cultural legacy, the Treasure tradition has not been immune to strong criticism and blatant infamy. In Chapter Three we will examine the current situation, but first we will examine the fact that the practice of Treasure revelation was often criticized in a more distant past. Criticism of the Treasure tradition has been voiced since the appearance of the earlier Treasure cycles. Already in the twelfth century a number of scholars like Chag lo tsā ba rdo rje dpal (1197-1265), 'Jig rten mgon po (1143-1217), and Sa skya paṇḍita

[136] Germano (1998: 91).
[137] Germano (1998) addresses and analyzes this isssue in his study of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs.
[138] Tucci (1949:112).

(1182-1251) aired their disapproval of Treasure revelation practices.[139] Although the PKT as well other early biographies of Padmasambhava do not provide any radical reasoning to support the authenticity of Treasure revealers and their revelation activities, the argument is that only Treasure revealers have the power (*dpang po*) to judge (*tshad gzung*) what a scripture is and discriminate between true and false Buddhist teachings.

The co-existence of authentic Treasure revealers and charlatans who pretend to be revealers is of concern to many scholars even today, as we shall see below. Although in the distant past a number of Tibetans addressed the issue including the Treasure revealer Ratna gling pa (1403-1478), in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries a number of authors took the opportunity to express their opinion within a debate about autenthicity in the Treasure tradition. This is especially true for the eighteenth-century rNying ma reinassance and later in its ecumenical (*ris med*) developments. Thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, for instance, the eighteenth-century dGe lugs pa scholar, provides a brief but incisive discussion on Treasure scriptures suggesting that they are not to be considered a unique Tibetan creation but an Indian one.[140] In addition, he also observes that the Treasure teachings are not only a prerogative of the rNying ma school but also of other Tibetan Buddhist traditions. However, Thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma seems to accept the list of Treasure revealers as provided by the PKT since in his treatise he mentions some of the Treasure revealers as prophesied in that text. Apparently, due to him, Treasure revealers such as Sangs rgyas bla ma (considered by the rNying ma tradition as the first known Treasure revealer),[141] and Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer up to bDe chen gling pa have gained a certain recognition even among other traditions.[142] Thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma provides a comprehensive overview of the general opinion in his lifetime on Treasure revealers and Treasure teachings (*gter chos*), as well as of pure visions

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[139] Doctor (2005: 32-33).

[140] Thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802). Kapstein (1989) has recently called attention to Thu'u bkwan's *Dogs dpyod snyan sgron du gsol ba nor bu'i ke ta ka'i byi dor* a refutation to Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor's *gSung rab rnam dag chu'i dri ma sel byed nor bu ke ta ka*. In his work Thu'u bkwan points out some prominent polemics of the time (eighteenth century) concerning the authenticity of some Tibetan works, including the *gter ma*. For an overview and study of the polemical literature (*dgag lan*) as a genre within Tibetan literary traditions see Lopez (1996: 217-228).

[141] gTer ston Sang rgyas bla ma (1000-80) is generally believed to be the first Treasure revealer to have appeared according to the prophesies of Padmasambhava. Dudjom (1991: 751-2).

[142] Thu'u bkwan in his TKGT provides details on Sangs rgyas bla ma (*c.* 990-1070), (Rong ston padma) bDe chen gling pa (1627/1663-1713) and mNga bdag nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1135-1204) to name a few among the most popular *gter ston* recognized by other schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

(*dag snang*). His remarks are therefore particularly interesting when framed within the general atmosphere of his time, which was a period of intense and dynamic intellectual debate.

> To say that all Treasure teachings are a religious practice of the rNying ma only is just to protect a short-sighted view, since generally Treasure teachings originated in India and exist also in other Tibetan traditions. However, although many false Treasures have been discovered after having been fabricated and concealed by some known as Treasure revealers, it would be improper to always refute also those [Treasure teachings] that are certainly authentic. Many authentic Treasure revealers such as those from Sangs rgyas bla ma up to bDe chen gling pa who have been prophesized in the *Thang yig*, and also quite a few other undisputed Treasure revealers who were not fixed by prophesies were successfully arranged by Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde when he composed the reverential petition to the *gTer ston brgya rtsa*. These Treasure revealers have purified both the Dharma and the living beings, and therefore are called the Great Ones.[143]

Some of these same ideas claiming the existence of Treasures in other Tibetan Buddhist traditions were already expounded earlier in the sixteenth century by the outstanding Tibetan historian dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1504-1566) in his well-known historical work, the *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*.[144] In an extensive section specifically dedicated to the history of the rNying ma tradition in Tibet,[145] dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba discusses the category of Treasures (*gter ma'i phyogs slar bshad par bya*)[146] where he refutes the idea that *gter ma* are a privilege of the rNying ma school since they occur instead in all ancient and new schools of Buddhism.[147] Later he explains that "the fact that countless precious Treasures are among the Treasures of the rNying ma school is because Treasure inventories (*kha byang*) were inserted in the king's Treasuries (*dkor mdzod*) hidden with the condition to benefit the future royal dynasties and restore temples."[148] Such a statement by a non-rNying ma scholar could be emblematic of a recurrent idea behind the phenomenon of Treasure revelation, that of a glorified Buddhist empire to be supported by such wonderful religious Treasures.

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[143] *spyir gter chos rgya gar du'ang byung zhing/ bod kyi grub mtha' gzhan la'ang yod pas gter chos thams cad rnying ma'i chos su byed pa ni thos rgya chung ba'i skyong no/ gter ston du grags pa 'ga' zhig gis rang gis bcos nas sbas te bton pa'i brdzus ma'ang yod mod kyang/ rnam dag yin nges kyang ches mang bas mtha' gcig tu smod mi rung ngo/ gter ston tshad ldan gtso cher thang yig nas lung bstan pa'i sangs rgyas bla ma nas bzung bde chen gling ba'i bar dang/ lung gis dngos su mi zin pa'i rtsod bral gyi gter ston kyang mang tsam zhig byung ba rnams phyis su chos rgyal dbang po'i sdes phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs nas gter ston brgya rtsa'i gsol 'debs brtsams pa ltar la/ de dag ni chaos dang gang zag gnyis ka rnam par dag pa'o zhes chen po rnams gsungs so* TKGT (1984: 68-69).

[144] dPa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba composed the *Chos 'byung mkhas pai dga' ston* in 1544.

[145] *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga'ston gyi yan lag gsum pa bod yul gyi skabs la le'u bcu las skabs lnga ba gsang sngags rnying ma'i chos byung.* KPGT (1959: 177-276).

[146] KPGT (1959: 254-276).

[147] *des na gter ni gsar rnying thams cad la yod pas rnying ma kho nar yang ma nges la..* KPGT (1959: 255).

[148] *rnying ma'i gter la'ang nor gter dpag med yod pa ni phyi rabs rgyal rgyud kyi don du dang lha khang rnams gso ba'i rkyen du sbas nas kha byang rnams rgyal po'i dkor mdzod du 'jog la.* KPGT (1959: 255).

Another influential Tibetan Buddhist scholar and prolific rNying ma pa author, Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624)[149] provides insights into the debate concerning the authenticity of some rNying ma doctrines and especially the Treasure teachings. In his refutation (*dgag pa*) of polemical issues concerning the rNying ma doctrines raised by bKra shis stobs rgyal, Sog bzlog pa elaborates on the Treasures and explains how the narrative and especially the legitimacy of the *gter ma* teachings are associated with Padmasambhava and his activities in Tibet. However, even in his terse statement aimed at briefly explicating the essence of Treasures, Sog bzlog pa does not lean towards an open apology of the tradition. Instead, he admits to certain incoherence in the claims of authenticity ascribed to Treasure revelations.[150] He writes:

> The Great Master, the Buddha in person [Padmasambhava], with great faith was called the Adamantine Master (*rdo rje slob dpon*) and fearing that many lines of transmission would be adulterated, he concealed them as treasures. Since in the past the time was not appropriate for the teachings, they have been hidden for those fortunate beings of the future. Authentic treasure teachings are indistinguishable from flawed ones. In the *Thang yig* it is written "except for dogs' corpses anything is revealed as Treasure!"[151]

But who are the authentic Treasure revealers then? If we turn again to the *Padma bka' thang* (PKT) we find a passage where something is said about the qualities of the revealers.

> Sealed treasures! Their revealers are perfect;
> nine endowed with many great gifts.
> They are high by caste, born lords of royal family;
> high by body, well-provided with beauties and signs;
> high by their faculties, having learned all they need to know;
> high through hearing, possessing Texts and Formulas in entirety;
> high through intuition, indicating through meaning in the words
> which are going to follow;
> high through meditation, lofty contemplators of View;
> high in valor, eclipsing and mastering others;
> high in controversy, triumphant with words which conquer;
> high through comprehension, distinguishing between what

[149] For some remarks on Sog bzlog pa see Kapstein (1989).
[150] The work by Sog bzlog pa is the *bDag po rin po che'i chos byung zhal snag nas blo bzang pa dgag pa mdzad pa* (BZGD in the bibliography) was written in reply to the rNying ma scholar bKra shis stobs rgyal's (a.k.a. dBang po'i sde) *sNga 'gyur bstan pa'i rnam gzhag mkhas pa'i snyan shal mdzes pa'i rgyan*. See BZGD p. 293. The work belongs to the Tibetan literary genre known as *dgag lan,* meaning "answers to refutations." For a discussion on this genre see Lopez (1996: 218).
[151] *slob dpon chen po sangs rgyas dngos de la rdo rje slob dpon zhes 'bod dad pa che/ brgyud rim mang na 'chal dogs pas gter sbas zhes pa/ sngon bstan pa'i dus la ma bab pas/ phyis kyi las can rnams kyi ched du sbas pa yin gyi/ gter chos yin tshad ma 'chal bar ma nges te/ thang yig tu/ gter nas khyi ro ma gtogs gang yang yong/ zhes sogs dang/* BZGD pp. 300-1. The last sentence is a quotation from the *Padma bka' thang* a passage often cited in a number other works. See PKT, p. 576 and Doctor (2005: 46).

accords to the Dharma and what does not;
patient and of gentle character, high and perfect.[152]

To counteract the heavy skepticism and criticism expressed against Treasure revealers over the centuries prior to the production of the PKT, the lines above attempt to support the image of the revealers as beings of superior qualities such as learning, meditation, and debating skills. However, little is said about what separates them from Buddhist adepts and there is a sense that Treasure revealers are authentic simply because they are Treasure revealers!

Two of the most significant discussions on the authenticity and legitimacy of Treasure teachings and their revealers appeared in Tibet in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first is by the nineteenth-century rNying ma polymath 'Ju mi pham, the *gTer ston brtag pa chu dwangs nor bu*.[153] Recently translated and studied, the text offers an analysis of the false Treasure revealers and the damage their misleading activities inflict on the Treasure tradition.[154] Only spiritually powerful individuals and authoritative leaders can, in 'Ju mi pham's conclusion, acknowledge the validity of the Treasure revealers.[155]

rDo grub chen 'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma (1865-1926) arrives at the same conclusion when in his *gTer gyi rnam bshad*, he dedicates some remarks to the question of how to identify Treasure revealers (*gter ston brtags thabs*). According to rDo grub chen bstan pa'i nyi ma, spiritual leaders can examine and validate Treasure revealers in two basic ways. One approach is to receive confirmation of the validity of the Treasure revealer through a vision from one of the three sources (*rtsa gsum*), namely the Guru (Padmasambhava), the tutelary deities (*yi dam*), or the *ḍākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro ma*). The other method, probably more practical, is for an expereinced master to analyze the Treasure revealer's collection of Treasure scriptures to ascertain their content and announce their validity. rDo grub chen 'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, however, warns that observations based on a Treasure revealer's behavior are not enough to judge a *gter ston*'s authenticity, because some have an "imperfect and mercurial character."[156] rDo grub chen dismisses the first option, the use of visions, as a rare undertaking and a less plausible method.

[152] PKT, pp. 648-49. This translation is from Yeshe tsogyal (1978: 610-11).
[153] TTTP 1975.
[154] Doctor (2005).
[155] Doctor (2005: 48).
[156] Thondup (1986: 157).

The second instead seems to be the most appropriate way to examine the authenticity of a Treasure revealer, a view that a number of Treasure revealers still support today.[157]

## *gTer ma and rDzogs chen*

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, like many other Treasure revealers, is a practitioner of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) and many of his revealed texts contain instructions about the practice of this system of meditation. Therefore, before concluding this first chapter I think it will be helpful to provide a few remarks and observations about the role of Treasure revelation in the production and organization of this doctrinal and meditative system so representative of the rNying ma school. A significant portion of the practices and teachings revealed through the predominantly mental form of Treasures (*dgongs gter*) fall within the system of contemplation practices called *rdzogs chen*, or “Great Perfection.” A Tantric-based tradition of both practice and theory of meditation, *rdzogs chen* consists of a distinctive body of teachings based on an original matrix of late Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism that is supposed to lead the adept to gain enlightenment.

Traditional Tibetan scholars maintain that the early *rDzogs chen* teachings were introduced into Tibet during the eighth century directly from India by the Indian masters Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra.[158] Evidence from the Dunghuang manuscripts dated around the eighth-century confirms the existence of a body of Buddhist Tantric teachings that combines two traditions: Mahāyoga (*rnal ’byor pa chen po*) and Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*). Recent study of the Dunghuang texts has shown that in the eighth century the Great Perfection was a distinct spiritual system departing from the Buddhist tradition.[159] Considered superior to the other Buddhist vehicles, the Great Perfection was labelled supreme (*a ti*) and therefore used as a platform for the interpretation and practice of earlier esoteric materials.[160] Most of the Tantras and their exegetical materials included under the rubric of *rdzogs chen* are believed to have been introduced as revealed Treasures (*gter ma*) and are contained in the Collection of Tantras of the rNying ma school (*rnying ma rgyud ’bum*). Up to the eleventh century, the Great Perfection was not organized into a well-structured system. Rather, it was diffused through Tantric teachings

[157] For my discussion on authenticity among Treasure revealers in present-day Tibet see Chapter Three in this volume.
[158] Thondup (1989), Dudjom (1991).
[159] Karmay (1988), van Shaik (2004: 5).
[160] Germano (1994), van Shaik (2004).

practiced within small-scale Buddhist communities. This was characterized by highly esoteric teachings with strict transmissions from an authentic teacher to a very limited number of close and selected disciples. This is also why many Treasure text titles begin with the term *yang gsang* on the title page. Early representative works of this period are for instance the *bSam gtan mig sgron* by gNubs Sang rgyas ye shes, and the *Kun byed rgyal po*.[161]

It was between the eleventh and the fourteenth century that the Great Perfection developed into a more structured body of literary texts and ritual practices.[162] Earlier teachings of *rdzogs chen* were soon influenced by other sources such as Chinese Chan Buddhism and indigenous ideas mixed with Indian Buddhist Tantras.[163] The teachings that started to develop in Tibet in the eleventh century were categorized in three classes or series of "mind," "space," and "instruction." Due to the very nature of these Buddhist materials, these were continually subjected to invention and reinvention until they became an orginal and distinctive product of Tibetan Buddhist thought.[164] The teachings were disseminated and practiced for a few centuries but it was especially in the fourteenth century that the Great Perfection became preeminent in rNying ma circles via Treasure revelation (*gter ma*) thanks to the revelations and collections of Padma las 'brel tsal (1291-1315?) and of the polymath kLong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer (1308-1363). They developed and systematized the teachings of *rdzogs chen* according to the system of the Seminal Heart (*snying thig*) and revitalized the entire tradition by compiling the Treasure cycle, or series of texts, of the *snying thig yab bzhi*.[165]

## *Concluding Remarks*

At the outset of the eleventh-century revival of Buddhism in Tibet, adherents to the early translation of Buddhist manuscripts (*snga 'gyur*) began to discover and reveal ancient manuscripts, religious items, and sacred scrolls that they claimed unveiled the precious teachings and instructions of Padmasambhava and his closest religious associates. These materials revealed

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[161] The *Byang chub kyi sems kun byed rgyal po* together with other two texts, namely the *mDo dgongs 'dus* and the *sGyu 'phrul gsang ba snying po*, are among the principal, although controversial, sources of *rdzogs chen* and constitute the triad *mdo rgyud sems gsum*. Karmay (1988: 139). See also Germano (1994: 219).
[162] Germano (1994), van Shaik (2004: 8-10).
[163] Germano (1994: 205).
[164] Germano (1994: 205).
[165] Karmay (1975, 1988), Germano (1982, 1994, 1998a), van Schaik (2004), Dalton (2004a). For a classification of the Tantras in the rNying ma school, see Thondup (1984).

procedures of human and divinely authored scriptural authentication based on a mytho-historical past supportive of the imperial age with emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan, Padmasambhava, and Ye shes mtsho rgyal as major protagonists. Despite the connections to the royal dynasties with the figure of the pious emperor Srong btsan sgam po and the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* and the strong nationalistic sense contained in the Treasures, the Treasure revealers predominantly designated Padmasambhava, a non-Tibetan, as the creator of such a tradition. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the paradigmatic figures of Padmasambhava, his consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and his twenty-five disciples took root in the mythical narrative of the origins of the Treasures in Tibet.

The Treasure literature is as rich as it is complex. Treasure revelation conveys a strong sense of a common imperial ideal, and emphasizes Tibet as a sacred land punctuated by highly powerful valleys, caves, and lakes where the divine manifests itself and the human gains liberation. All these qualities have made the tradition of revealing Treasures prominents in Tibetan cultural and religious lore.

With the ability to produce historiographical manuscripts, sophisticated philosophical treatises, contemplative manuals, and esoteric instructions, the Treasure tradition became one of the most powerful means to preserve the old Tantric teachings and to disseminate a tradition under constant threat of being overshadowed by the modernist (*gsar ma*) traditions. Despite the criticism advanced by many modernist authors, the rNying ma scholars succeeded in creating their own canon, the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, which includes both *bka' ma* and *gter ma* scriptures.

The traditional rNying ma representation of the Treasure system conveys the idea of a multi-level performance by the Treasure revealers. The primary focus is the articulation and re-proposition of a well-defined and homogeneous corpus of narratives related to Padmasambhava's presence in Tibet. This essential task is present in most Treasure teachings (*gter chos*) that can be identified as such. It is defined by the ongoing reference to the imperial mythology, the religious kings, and the missionary activities of the Buddhist master Padmasambhava in Tibet under emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan. It is further defined by the revelation and diffusion of Padmasambhava's teachings many centuries after his time in Tibet by prophesized revealers.

Another significant aspect of the *gter ma* tradition is the strategy the system produced to legitimize their new scriptural revelations as authoritative Buddhist texts. Because they were the

Padmasambhava's direct teachings, they were able to compete with the new translations of Buddhist text coming from India from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries. This ligitimizing strategy has been crucial to the survival of the tradition and has been continually renewed, re-energized, and updated by the works of the many apologists, scholars, and savants of the rNying ma school. Additionally, an essential element in the accomplishments of such a method of revelation is its relation to the fortunes of the teachings of *rDzogs chen*. These meditative teachings are intimately connected with Treasure revelation.

# Chapter Two: Religion and Politics in Tibet: The Contemporary Context



In the previous chapter we have seen how historically the ideology of the Treasure revelation system found legitimacy and developed primarily around the figure of Padmasambhava. This chapter will focus on the socio-political circumstances that have affected such development in present-day Tibet. We will follow the development of the Treasure tradition in the context of Chinese economic reforms and religious policies in the post-Mao era.

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Tibetans have undergone three decades of governmental policies that have had significant repercussions on every aspect of their lives. Largely focused on creation of a market economy in the country, these reforms have also changed the Chinese leaders' attitude towards culture and religion. A more liberal and more tolerant approach to religion and ethnic forms of cultural expression has allowed for some degree of revitalization of religious practice and the resurgence of religious institutions. Religion is the core of Tibetans' sense of identity. Monasteries have been allowed to reopen, renovation and reconstruction of religious complexes is in progress, and a monastic community has gradually returned to life. However, despite the central government's cautious openess towards religion, the monastery as locus of power, authority, and religious identity has suffered significant blows.

Despite decades of hostile religious policies, repression, and political control, religious communities, including monasteries and other forms of communal religious gathering, have not only survived, but they have found a renewed sense of scope and presence. Many monasteries have repopulated themselves, re-established their ritual activities, and re-organized their religious education. In eastern Tibet, in parallel with a gradual growth of traditional monastic institutions, the last two decades have also seen the emergence of a number of religious communities especially in the form of unconventional religious encampments (*chos sgar*) and mountain retreats (*ri khrod*). We will soon see below that "unconventional" refers to the fact that most of these Buddhist communities differ from traditional monasteries in terms of organization, administration, and above all population. In many instances these communities have been founded and are currently lead by Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) basing their leadership on a strong charismatic personality.

In the summer and fall of 2001 work teams (Ch. *gongzuodui*; *las don ru khag*) led by the Chinese authorities raided bLa rung sgar in gSer rta and then Ya chen sgar in Khrom thar a few months later, two of the most populated and well-known Buddhist institutes in Khams.[166] Exact figures are difficult to obtain, but by the year 2001 bLa rung sgar alone had a population of nearly 10,000 people including monks, nuns, and lay practitioners.[167] The teams executed orders concerning the re-establishment of control over religious activities in the area. This was done by reducing the number of residents at the religious centers to a much smaller population of both monastics (monks and nuns) and lay practitioners.[168] The dramatic results were that about one thousand monastic dwellings were forcefully demolished at bLa rung sgar and nearly eight hundred at Ya chen sgar. Additionally, according to reports obtained by monitoring agencies and human rights groups, thousands of monks and nuns were ordered to leave from both religious encampments and forced to return to their home monasteries and nunneries. This episode is emblematic of the Chinese central government's increased attention towards religious control and national minorities-related issues in the country. Since 1995 the Chinese government has adopted harsh measures of destruction of religious dwellings, control over religious practices, and persecution of religious leaders, procedures which they justify as facilitating economic development and social welfare. As I hope to convey in this chapter, the link between the re-emergence of alternative forms of religious gathering such as the large rNying ma religious encampments (*chos sgar*), mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*), and the Treasure revealers who are their leaders is of central importance for an understanding of Tibetans' attempts to maintain traditional forms of religious practice and education in their land in the face of the central government's arbitrary regulations and repressive religious policy. This chapter explores the

[166] bLa rung sgar is located on a site that in 1880 served as mountain retreat center (*ri khrod*) inhabited by the Treasure revealer Khrag 'thun bDud 'joms gling pa (1835-1904). In 1980 the place, also called in gSer rta "religious city" (*chos kyi grong khyer*) of bLa rung, was enlarged by mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933-2004), and during an official ceremony in 1987 the tenth Panchen lama named it gSer rta bLa rung lnga rig nang bstan slob gling. Tshul khrims (2005).

[167] bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho's personal communication. bLa rung sgar, gSer rta October 2001.

[168] There is little information available concerning the current religious situation in eastern areas of both Khams and A mdo. However, in the past few years numerous attempts have been made by a number of international human rights monitoring agencies and Tibet support groups to access and diffuse information about the conditions of religious revival and Chinese party's control over Tibetan people in various Tibetan areas of the PRC. The crackdown on bLa rung sgar and ya chen sgar have been reported and analyzed extensively in the Western media and in reports by Tibet monitoring organizations such as ICT (International Campaign for Tibet), and TIN (Tibet Information Network). As for the destruction of monasteries, the persecutions of religious leaders, and the crackdown on religion in Tibet, see the latest report by ICT (2004), *When the Sky Fell to Earth*. For an overview of the events see also *Destruction of Serthar Institute: A Special Report* (TCHRD 2001), published by the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy.

state of religious practice, especially Buddhism, in contemporary Tibet and the socio-political dynamics brought about by Chinese state policy on religions over the past three decades.[169] In particular this chapter provides the political background and social landscape into which the development of new forms of religious gatherings led by gter stons such as gTer chen bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje have become popular in the Tibetan regions of Khams today. In doing so, this chapter will first examine some key historical circumstances that have characterized China’s religious policy in Tibetan areas of the PRC since its annexation in the early 1950s focusing on the post-Mao and above all on the post-Deng era. The latter marks the outset of cutting edge economic reforms and political change that paved the way not only to a developmental strategy for a modern China, but also to a rethinking of socialism as the political ideology of the country.

While sharing fundamental characteristics of methods and modalities found in Treasure revelation as practiced in pre-modern Tibet, the activities associated with *gter ma* discovery, visionary revelation, and their influence in today’s eastern Tibet have been significantly affected by modernity, historical events, and the dramatic social changes brought about by post-Mao and post-Deng Chinese policies. This analysis shows that the PRC’s policy towards forms of religious expression indeed allows for a relaxed attitude of local authorities and tolerance towards traditional manifestations of religious belief, fervor, and practice. On the other hand, however, the central government’s tight surveillance of, and political and administrative influence on, religious activities (both popular and institutional) and monastic establishments in Tibet has inevitably caused changes in the ways local Tibetans manifest their religiosity and in the consistency and significance of traditional religious education for monastics. I maintain that these two interdependent factors are offsprings of the secularization and modernization processes sweeping through China today and therefore through Tibet, and that as a result a competitive environment has been created for alternative forms of religious gathering to reappropriate religious power and authority that once was the monopoly of the monasteries. This is true especially for a number of charismatic Tibetan figures and for the spectacular development of a specific type of quasi-monastic religious center. The latter are peculiar religious establishements in which predominantly rNying ma leaders’ efforts are focused on the practice of contemplative disciplines and provide access to traditional education. These religious encampments, generally

[169] In this study my analysis will focus primarily, if not uniquely, on Tibetan Buddhism. Although a small portion of the Tibetan population performs other forms of religious practice and represents other religious faiths, such as Bon, Islam, and Christianity, this chapter will touch upon these religions only tangentially.

called *chos sgar*, in Tibetan, or simply *sgar*, have grown around monastic and/or non-celibate Buddhist leaders, whose identities are shaped by charismatic powers, broad religious education and experience, and above all *gter ma* revelations. For such an analysis I shall contextualize the historical scenario within a specific time frame in the twentieth century, a time of intense and highly dramatic political, social, and religious changes on the Tibetan plateau.

This chapter attempts to show how these policies have affected Tibetans' adaptation and resistance to the new socio-political circumstances in order to maintain their distinctive heritage and to practice their culture and religions. Then, drawing on personal ethnographic data and a large body of literature on contemporary Tibet, this chapter discusses key arguments on how Tibetans have adapted in their practice and diffusion of Buddhism. Special attention will be placed on the case study of my research, which is concerned with a number of present-day Treasure revealers and their activities in areas of Khams in eastern Tibet. In addition, the relationship between religious encampments, mountain hermitage, and Treasure revelation will also be analyzed. Methodologically this will deal with the emergence of Buddhist encampments and mountain hermitages, which with their strong focus on meditation have given renewed meaning to traditional religious lore in the face of strong control imposed by the Chinese government on religious practice and traditional religious education. It is my belief that in so far as no political activity disloyal to the government is perceived or suspected within the religious community these quasi-monastic centers complement the activities offered in monasteries and are not only tolerated but in some instances even supported by local Tibetan authorities. The increased popularity of rNying ma religious encampments (*chos sgar* or *chos sgar chen mo*), and mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) in areas of eastern Tibet, namely Khams and mGo log, is the result of the dramatic conditions that have shaped the practice of religion in Tibet today. It is my sense that the pressure put on monastic institutions as centers of the Tibetan Buddhist world has caused a decentralization, to some extent, of religious authority and traditional education and instruction that was once mostly, if not uniquely, the privilege of the monastic institutions. One of the most striking phenomena is the emergence of Treasure revealers and their professional religious activities as a guiding force behind the charismatic leadership taking place in many Buddhist encampments and mountain hermitages in eastern Tibet. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an analysis of how globalization, new communication technologies, and the Internet are shaping the world of Buddhism in Tibet even among Treasure revealers and their disciples.

Following the political opening and the economic reforms propagated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, cultural and above all religious issues in China have received varying degrees of attention by Chinese leaders. Although issues of religious belief and practice are dealt with by the central government with attention and concern, religion has been one of the most difficult issues in the eyes of Chinese leaders. In the name of national unity, stability, and economic development, Chinese leaders aim at complete control over all religious activities and religious institutions in the country. The problem is even more complex in regard to minority nationalities, whose religion and traditional forms of religious education and belief are crucial to the ethnic group's identity. A number of Tibet analysts, scholars, and human rights organizations, for instance, see the patriotic education campaign in monasteries, the implementation of new laws on religious organization, restraints on religious forms of writing and publishing, and the control over religious education in Tibet as serious human rights violations. These policies hamper Tibetans' assertion of their cultural identity in their land and their ability to safeguard their cultural and religious heritage.[170]

### *The Political Context: Post-Mao, Post-Deng, and the Development of the Western Regions*

During the first phase of Sino-Tibetan relations in the 1950s, in the attempt to integrate all Tibetan areas into the Chinese nation-state, China's policy, especially towards central Tibet, focused on gradually winning over the majority of the Tibetan elite rather than the immediate implementation of socialist reforms.[171] Despite the arrival of Chinese Communist teams and the pouring of military troops into Tibetan regions, social and religious ways of life did not greatly change. This means that religious life was not affected by the arrival of Mao's army. Until the departure of its political and religious leader, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, in 1959, the religious structure of Tibet, was left virtually intact.[172] Soon, however, the disastrous famine caused by Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward (Ch. *dayuejin*,1958-1960) and the effects of the orgy of violence and radical rhetoric during the Cultural Revolution (Ch. *wenhua dagemin*,1966-1976) cast a shadow over the cultural and social life in the land of snows. The years following the

[170] ICT (2004); HRW (1997, 2001, 2004); Schwartz (1994a, 1994b, 1999a, 1999b); Smith (1998); Havnevik (1994).
[171] Shakya (1999: 92-95).
[172] Shakya (1999: 92-95).

Chinese takeover of Tibet were characterized by a struggle for survival. In the attempt to keep their cultural traditions alive, Tibetans have adapted to the new situation and indeed have proved to be resilient in coping with Chinese control and flexible in modeling their lifestyle to the new order.

Supported by the Marxist theory of historical materialism where religion is seen as detrimental to the development of a society and popular religious beliefs qualify as superstition, during the Cultural Revolution Chinese leaders accused monasteries in Tibet of being the heart of a feudal system (Ch. *fengjian zhidu*) and cultural backwardness (Ch. *luohou wenhua*). Monastic economy was also fiercely attacked and religious estate properties confiscated.[173] Until the end of the Mao era, popular religious practices, such as spirit possession, divinations, deity cults, and pilgrimages to sacred places were labelled "superstitious" (Ch. *mixin*; *rmongs dad*) and therefore prohibited. Under such accusations, all major and minor religious centers were targeted by local Communist authorities. Most monasteries and their repositories of century-old texts were simply destroyed, and the few that were spared complete destruction were mostly severely damaged and their religious leaders persecuted. Monks and nuns were forced to abandon their residences and compelled to live a householder life. Those who were allowed to continue to live a monastic life had to undergo intensive political indoctrination meetings and struggle sessions (Ch. *douzheng*; *'thab 'dzing*).[174] The dismembering of the monasteries, the application of strict policies aimed at the overall socialist transformation of the country (and therefore of Tibet as well), and the displacement of people caused traumatic psychological damage and a deep sense of loss especially during the last violent decade of the Cultural Revolution.[175]

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[173] See Welch (1972).

[174] The overall process of change and socialist transformation of Tibet and Tibetans began with the democratic reforms in 1956. Much of the application of such reforms was accompanied by intense struggles against those that Chinese propaganda defined as upper class "exploiters" and uncooperative traditional leaders, namely aristocratic personalities and religious figures such as lamas, abbots, and influential monks. Smith (1997: 387-440).

[175] I borrow here the term "dismembering" as used by Germano (1998). See for instance the extension of the "great leap forward" policy to Tibet, which not only aimed at a transformation of the political and economic situation of the whole country, but also involved a gradual but necessary transformation, in the Chinese eyes, of local cultures, considered "anti-socialist". Smith (1997: 426-40). Goldstein (1998), among others, has recently pointed out how in the past decades under Chinese rule and CCP supervision, monasteries have ceased to be the great institutional, cultural, and economic centers they once were in pre-modern Tibet when religious study, scholasticism, and liturgical activities were the main occupations of monastic life. The dramatic attacks on monasticism, one of the pillars of Tibetan Buddhism, and the systematic destruction of thousands of monasteries inevitably contributed to the dismantling of the privileges, power, and authority exercised for centuries by the monastic institutions. See Shakya (1999: 288), and also TIN (1997: 40-59).

During the Cultural Revolution any form of Tibetan nationalism was suppressed and most forms of cultural expression were thoroughly eradicated. As Smith has observed in his study on Tibetan nationalism,

> Assuming that the demise of Tibetan nationalism had been substantially achieved, post-Maoist liberalization aimed at improving Tibetan economic conditions and allowing some of the more innocuous expressions of Tibetan culture, including some Tibetan religious practices. This economic and cultural liberalization, it was anticipated, would defuse the remnants of Tibetan discontent with Chinese rule. Undoubtedly, few Chinese would have predicted that an improvement in Tibetan economic and political conditions would lead to a dramatic revival in Tibetan nationalism. For Tibetans, however, economic liberalization, accompanied by a slight political liberalization, allowed for the expression of shared identity and culture, including the common experience of oppression, for the first time since 1959.[176]

Although in the post-Mao reform era in the 1980s government leaders shifted away from radical anti-traditionalism and embraced a more regulatory "tolerant" attitude, the bulk of surveillance and regulations applied by the PRC government on every kind of religious activity over the past decades has nevertheless brought inevitable detrimental consequences to the intellectual and cultural output in the religious field. Historically, the Chinese government openly advanced its conviction that religion in all its manifestations in Tibet, as well as in other parts of the country, was a hindrance to Chinese economic development. Religion as a form of cultural identity especially posed a problem in the attempt to gain political loyalties within non-Han ethnic groups and to disseminate Communist ideology. Religion was seen as a force slowing down the application of economic and political reform plans that were essential to optimize national development as designed by the government. Recently China observers have come to understand that only the central leadership has the legality to promote cultural development among the people, especially those in ethnic minorities. To put it in Dreyer's words, "In actual practice, cultural development carried on by party and government *on behalf of* minorities seems to be acceptable, whereas cultural development carried out by minorities *on their own behalf* is not."[177]

However, Deng Xiaoping's government soon realized that a more relaxed attitude towards people's social life and cultural and religious habits would do no harm. In fact, as some scholars have observed, in many areas across China the attitude of the local government has

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[176] Smith (1997: 563).
[177] Dreyer (2006: 298).

changed, and forms of heavy control and crackdown over superstition and popular religion have become only occasional or even abandoned.[178] One reason, however, is that more and more local government official have been less reticent in expressing and manifesting their sympaties towards and at times even in support of influential religious figures and monasteries. Despite such a change in strategy and the leadership's shift from political priorities to economic interests, institutional religion is still under constant pressure and unvarying surveillance in some areas. The Chinese considered monasteries to be centers of intellectual, cultural, and literary production and therefore marks of national and religious identity, which were regarded as potential hindrances to the Chinese conquest of the territory. However, even without their landed power and wealth already removed in the 1950s, most monasteries were capable of regaining access to power. As a way to counter this reaction, one of the major objectives of the Chinese transformation of Tibet has been to further control key forces in monasteries, namely their traditional education system and their large population. By reducing their population, monasteries lost a major portion of their social and political influence.

The years that followed the Cultural Revolution affected Tibet in both religious geography and human resources. Tibetan landscapes were stripped of their sacred sites and religious buildings, and Tibetans were deprived of their cultural habits and identity. Following the ravages performed by the Red Guards across Tibet, much of the Tibetan architectural heritage and cultural legacy was eradicated from the geography of the land and the psychological structures of its people. As Germano puts it, "the bodies of religious Tibet were sacrificed and resacrificed on multiple fronts for a three-decade period which resulted in the literal deconstruction of an entire civilization."[179]

On various occasions from 1966 to 1977, most of Tibet's religious compounds, temples, and monasteries were increasingly under attack. The chaotic and devastating iconoclastic agenda of the Cultural Revolution aimed not only to destroy the core of traditional religious life, but also to strip the monasteries of any sacred image, such as statues, murals, and paintings. Moreover, the devastation of the immense religious corpus of textual material, which filled century-old monastic libraries, deprived Tibet of much of its unique cultural legacy.[180]

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[178] Chau (2006: 215).
[179] Germano (1998: 53).
[180] Germano (1998: 53).

Deng Xiaoping's halt to such a state of affairs allowed for a more tolerant, although intermittent, attitude within state-led policies about Tibet. His political rise and the economic reform program he conducted in 1978 emphasized economic development and an open-door policy. Chinese government leaders paid attention to non-Han Chinese groups in their attempt to provide equal economic development and social progress all over the PRC. It was especially towards the Tibetan plateau that Chinese authorities saught fast and substantial results.[181] Following Deng Xiaoping's "Reforms through Opening" (Ch. *gaige kaifang*), a major political side effect was also achieved which enhanced a more relaxed administration concerning population movement and residency in the country. The intransigent *hukou* system, for instance, was temporarily ignored to benefit a faster economic development especially in the western regions.[182] In order to encourage the physical mobility and internal migrations to benefit the urban economy and to develop the many remote areas of the country, such as border minority areas, the *hukou* system, also called *huji zhidu*, or system of household/residence registration, was progressively relaxed. As Becker observes, urban population swelled within a few years and following Marxist ideas of providing a more equitable distribution of the population over the country, regions such as Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet became destinations for thousands of workers backed by a widespread colonization policy.[183] To Tibetans, the relaxation on religious policy by the central authority in the 1970s meant a return to public expressions of religious belief and practice.

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[181] Goldstein (1997: 65-66) argues that after the failure of the "hard-line assimilation" period and development policies applied in Tibet by the Chinese government as recognised by Hu Yaobang, the new strategic plans were focused on an ethnic and an economic dimension. The former was to revitalize Tibetan culture, language, and religion and to give more voice to ethnic Tibetans in the management of their region. The latter was instead to draw attention to the economic development of Tibet.

[182] The Chinese term *hukou* can be literary rendered as "households and population" and refers to a registered permanent residence or "household registration system" established in the mid-1950s to which all Chinese had to subscribe in the PRC. According to such a system the population was divided into two major categories, urban and rural, and further classified according to race, class, and political loyalty. Although such a policy provide certain benefits to the population such as access to a state welfare system and the supply of food, clothing and pensions, freedom of movement was virtually denied and people could not leave or enter cities without written permission. For a description of the *hukou* system see Becker (2003: 90-93). See also Lieberthal (2004: 123-24; 307-308), Kam (2004), and Wang (2005a, 2005b).

[183] Becker (2003: 95-96). For a study of migrations in minority areas of the PRC see Hansen (2005). Academic studies of migration trends towards Tibetan areas are still a lacuna. Additionally, to my knowlwedge documentation and statistical figures concerning Han Chinese migrants movements and population in Tibetan areas are non accesisble. However, a persistent movement of migrants of Han and other Chinese ethnic origins towards Tibetan regions incresed at various degrees from the 1980s to the 1990s.

Following such policies, since the early 1980s and even more during the 1990s, increasing numbers of Han Chinese and other ethnic groups such as Hui and Salar[184] have poured into the Tibetan plateau to participate in the economic development plans of the Chinese government in minorites areas.[185] With the hope of gaining prompt economic results, the central authorities reluctantly compromised on cultural concessions such as the forms of religious expression allowed by the Chinese central authority. Temples were allowed to be reconstructed and repaired, and religious scriptures to be printed.[186] Interestingly, however, the genuine reversal of Maoist policies and the profound decentralisation and de-collectivisation that Deng supported, the increased Tibetan presence among local party cadres starting with the early 1980s, and even the apologies by senior leaders such as Hu Yaobang who encouraged a closer look at the needs of Tibetans in their own land suggest that the government itself was not monolithic but featured different factions, some of whom were against what was going on in Tibet and saw it as a legitimate place for more cultural tolerance.

China and Tibet analysts and scholars have recently contributed to an understanding of the state of religion, state-religion relations, and religious policy in contemporary China as well as the revitalization of many religious practice and festivals, especially at a local level in various areas of Tibet.[187] By the end of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in 1976, a significant portion of Tibetan monasteries, nunneries, temples, and other religious and sacred sites laid destroyed, violently ravaged, or severely looted. During the years of the Cultural Revolution many monasteries and temples had been occupied and used for secular purposes by the Red Guards. Some were employed as primary and secondary schools, storerooms, weapon storehouses, factories, and warehouses. Others were turned into living quarters, business offices, and workers' apartments. Thousands of religious personalities, monks, and nuns were forced to disrobe and embrace worldly lifestyles. Since the founding of the PRC in 1949 and the rise to power of the

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[184] According to Chinese sources on the history of the Yushu TAP next to Tibetans and Han Chinese, some eleven different Chinese ethnic groups inhabit the regions in different measures. See Gao (1985: 3).

[185] In her study of Han Chinese settlers in minority areas of China, Hansen notes that there is no homogeneous sense of agreement with the government's scheme of "development of the West" among Chinese settlers and that "the CCP's civilizing mission in minority areas is contested, non-monolithic and viewed differently by different people belonging to the vast group of Han settlers." Hansen (2005: 7).

[186] Germano (1998: 53-54).

[187] For general studies on contemporary religion in the PRC, see for instance Chau (2006); Hornemann (2005); Overmyer (2003); Potter (2003); Dean (1998); Leung (2005; 1995). For a recent contribution in the study of religions in traditional and contemporary China see also the website created by Barend Ter Haar, "Chinese Religious Culture: a research guide" at http://website.leidenuniv.nl/~haarbjter/chinrelbibl.htm. For the specific case of Tibet see, for instance, Goldstein and Kapstein (1998).

Chinese Communist Party led by Mao Zedong, Marxist-Leninism was the leading ideology permeating every aspect of the country's social, cultural, and political life. Religious activities and beliefs and any form of local cult were forbidden altogether and branded as feudal, backward, and superstitious. In 1976, in the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), originally founded in the mid 1950s, established that property of religious organizations must be returned to the original owners, that compensation refunds would be provided for damage and reparations, and that government loans would be provided to local administrations in order to help reconstruct basic religious and secular buildings.[188] By the year 1990, a limited number of monasteries and nunneries had been reopened in China and to some degree traditional education and religious practice was re-established.[189]

With the new leadership under Deng Xiaoping, the errors of the past were admitted and a change of attitude was perceived as necessary to move on into the phase of economic reforms. Such an attitude was also to influence ways of approaching cultural issues and religious matters. A passage from the window “Chinese Religions” (*Zhongguo Zongjiao*) at the State Administration of the Religious Affairs of PRC (*Guojia zongjiao shiwuju*) will help explain the government’s position in this regard:

> The ‘cultural revolution’ (1966 to 1976) had a disastrous effect on all aspects of the society in China, including religion. But in the course of correcting the errors of the ‘cultural revolution’ governments at all levels made great efforts to revive and implement the policy of freedom of religious belief, redressed the unjust, false or wrong cases imposed on religious personages, and reopened sites for religious activities.[190]

Although economically PRC state plans provided relative priviledged attention to the Western regions up to the 1970s, it was only in the 1990s, with the ninth five-year plan (1996-2000) that it launched economic reforms and development strategies that emphasized raising the standards of living.[191] The government expectation was that with the improvement of the

[188] The Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB, Ch. *zongjiao shiwuju*, *chos don cus*) is an institution established in the 1950s to implement government decisions at the State Council rather than formulate specific policy for the actual administration of religion. Hunter and Chan (1996: 54-55) observe that the RAB had the major task “to identify and manipulate religious personnel who would fully support Party policy, and to expel or arrest leaders who opposed it.” In Tibet it was established in 1956. Goldstein (1998: 7-8) and Stockwell (1996: 34).

[189] Stockwell (1996: 35), reports that by the end of 1990, the total number of temples, monasteries, and churches that were renovated or rebuilt was 30,000. He also writes that 20,000 is instead the total amount of other "meeting places" open to worship. What these meeting places actually are he does not explain.

[190] http://www.sara.gov.cn/GB/zgzj/

[191] Dreyer (2006: 283); Rossabi (2004: 8); Hunter (1996: 28).

economy in these areas the results would on the one hand engender loyalty to the government and on the other determine a progressive weakening of separatist and nationalistic activities, which posed a continuous threat to national unity and stability. With this intent the government launched a new law specifically aimed at minorities and their lands. The “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Autonomy of Minority Nationality Regions” was promulgated in the fall of 1984. It assured degrees of autonomy over the development of the society, economy, and culture in some areas of Tibet, including the Tibetan Autonomous Region, dKar mdzes (Ganzi TAP), and a few other prefectures.[192] In the same year regional governments launched a series of new regulations following the passage of the new law on national regional autonomy.[193] The organization of these regulations aimed to specifically develop Tibet through economic and industrial projects. These regulations also involved a controversial “open door” policy to foreign trade. Regulations covered economic, social, and cultural policies of Tibetan areas and minority groups. While we have noted that popular Buddhist practice was allowed for and indeed was being revitalized by the populace, it was at this time that the authorities began to impose restrictions and controls on organized Buddhism of the monasteries, religious colleges and temples. Monasteries and nunneries were particularly controlled. Local authorities’ attention, pushed by their new regional directives, began to limit the increasing number of both monks and nuns enrolling in religious institutions, as well as to discourage young novices below eighteen years of age from entering monasticism.

With the political changes and Deng’s leadership’s reformist strategy, Tibetans seized the opportunity to find ways to preserve their national, cultural, and ethnic identity, as well as their practice of religion. However, as Schwartz observes, after the post-reform religious toleration era, which lasted until the late 1980s and early 1990s, the political leaders emphasized policies on “tailoring religious belief to suit the requirements of a modernizing society.”[194] In doing so, religious tolerance was thus circumscribed in favor of modernization.

The harshness of the Chinese government’s policies applied towards ethnic groups of the PRC epitomizes the extent to which the Chinese leaders have tried to solve these ever-present issues. Indeed, the PRC strives to control the ethnic areas so as to enhance economic

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[192] The October 1, 1984 “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Autonomy of Minority Nationality Regions” was further revised on February 28, 2001 to support the new initiatives related to the development of the Western Regions. See Human Rights Watch (2004: 11).

[193] Smith (1997: 584-86). For a detailed analysis of the 1984 “Law on Regional Autonomy in Tibet” see also ICT and IHRLG (1994).

[194] Schwartz (1999b).

development and modernization throughout the country. However, it has also aimed at modeling the religion issue according to a more “modern” and “human development”-oriented political vision. One of the most dramatic results of the Chinese takeover of the Tibetan plateau has been the ongoing flight of Tibetans abroad.[195] The harshness of political campaigns, the inexorable transformation of the society, the ongoing influx of Han Chinese into Tibet, the complete control of the administration of policy, economy, and education, the CCP’s involvement in the religious affairs and the management of cultural activities, and the devaluation of traditional culture and replacement with a Chinese national identity through coercive Communist indoctrination all contributed to the departure of many Tibetans from their land. In 1959 many representatives of the aristocratic and religious elite and ordinary Tibetans alike followed the fourteenth Dalai Lama’s flight into exile to southern neighboring lands of Nepal and India. Among them most of the prominent scholars and teachers and nearly all of the leading religious figures left their home monasteries to live a life abroad and to promote their culture and safeguard their religious legacy in self-imposed exile. The Tibetan religious world, once unchallenged and dominated by brilliant scholasticism, erudition, and unique ritual praxis, was irrevocably damaged during the years 1956-1976, the effects of which are still very evident today.

The decline of the monastic hegemony, which in pre-1959 Tibet was mainly held by dGe lugs leaders, and the reduction of the social and political influence of monasteries resulted in a decline of the spiritual authority of institutional Buddhism and of organized religion in general. This was precisely one of the major aims of Chinese Communist-powered policies. Today, as in pre-modern Tibet, some of the major monasteries are allowed to host a few selected traditional public ritual events, festivals, and celebrations thus maintaining some of the old socio-cultural significance of the monastic centers. However, today’s monasteries are not the large scholastic and ritual landmark of pre-modern Tibet. Most of the state-sponsored reconstructions of monasteries and the rehabilitation of traditional religious festivals are those monastic compounds utilized by the tourist industry such as Se ra, Bras spungs, and dGa’ ldan monasteries, bKra shis lhun po in central Tibet, sKu ’bum (Ch. Ta’ersi) and Bla brang in A mdo (Qinghai), and to some extent the sKye rgu don grub gling and sDe gde dgon chen in Khams (Sichuan).[196]

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[195] According to the Central Tibetan Administration in Exile, the current refugee population of Tibetans living outside the People’s Republic of China is of approximately 145,150 individuals against the approximate 6 million living in the Tibetan regions of the People’s Republic of China. http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php

[196] It is worth noting here that although such a statement can be true in general, in Tibet the situation differs from one region to another. While central Tibet and especially Lhasa retains an unmatched popularity as tourist attraction,

## *The Religious Context: Religious Revivalism and Cultural Reassertions*

Marxist ideology-backed Chinese policy makers attempted a systematic decimation of monasteries in Tibet considered to be centers of "feudalism" (Ch. *fengjian zhuyi*) and "class-based exploitation" of serfs and slaves. This resulted in an irrevocable reduction of resident monastic populations and the launching of a large-scale campaign aimed at weakening their socio-religious influence over the population undermining and diminishing the scope of any further religious, cultural, and socio-political development in Tibet for two decades.[197] Here my argument emphasizes that the traditional monastic institutions have been weakened institutionally, financially, and psychologically by decades of atheist repression. Much of the Chinese propaganda towards Tibet is aimed at justifying the PRC claims of territorial unity. One of the most popular narrative tropes used by Chinese Communist apologists and party leaders to portray Tibet before the introduction of democratic reforms was that of a land devastated by feudalism. They deploy Marxist idiom of feudal estate-holders, serfdom, slavery, and superstitions, and highlight their success with the "emancipated serfs and slaves" who nowadays enjoy freedom, benefits, and human rights. [198]

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the same can not be stated with regard to other major Tibetan regions and towns. Apart from Lhasa and other major urban areas of central Tibet, such as gZhis ka rtse and rGyal rtse, actually only Xining in Qinghai province, the home of sKu 'bum monastery, and Lan zhou in Gansu province, home of the Bla brang monastery, are destinations of both domestic and international mass tourism. Although the Chinese government and local administrations are developing the tourist industries at the local level, most of Khams and A mdo are still much less visited by tourists than central Tibet and bordering cities.

[197] Such an official stance towards the status of Tibet and its historical past has been diffused by the Chinese government in many ways. A renowned booklet was distributed among Chinese embassies in the 1970s which promoted the official Chinese stance on Tibet and its view on the historical, social, cultural, religious, and demographical status of the land. Known in English by the title *100 Questions and Answers about Tibet*, the booklet became popular among Tibet experts and analysts. A recent publication, *Le Tibet est-il Chinois? Réponses à cent questions chinoises* (edited by Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille, 2002) provides a refutations to Chinese historical prerogatives. An overview in English of the Chinese position on the status of Tibet and the "100 Questions and Answers" can be accessed on the Internet at several websites. For instance, see the official Chinese website on Tibet at http://www.tibetinfor.com.cn for general information. For a complete updated version of *100 Questions and Answers about Tibet* see also http://www.tibetinfor.com.cn/tibetzt-en/question_e/index.htm.

[198] Due to the absence of reliable figures it is still difficult to know how many monks and nuns there were in Tibet before the Chinese takeover. Estimates limited to the areas of central Tibet report a monastic population existed there of at least 25,000 monks among the main three monastic centers of Se ra, Bras spungs, and dGa' ldan in Lhasa. Rf. Shakya (1999: 252). According to Chinese figures, the monastic population in central Tibet in the late 1950s was estimated between 110,000 and 115,000, which constituted more than 9% of the population of central Tibet. See Shakya (1999: 253) and Smith (1997: 474). In 1960 the population of monks and nuns was estimated at little more than 18,000 and in the period 1958-1960 the number of monasteries and temples was estimated to have dropped from 2,711 to 370 in the TAR alone. See also Smith (1997: 474). However, the figures concerning the number of

One consequence of these dramatic facts was, therefore, a progressive decline of the monastic-led authority in the religious sphere, which contributed to a decentralization of legitimacy and religious authority from monastic-centered institutions to alternative forms of religious community. In the long run this alteration has triggered a Tibetan response in their newly “colonized” world. The weakening of the once dominant power of monastic estates and the shift of century-long centralized authority over religious affairs from religious leaders to the new ruling secular (Communist) elite has created “openings” for other, alternative forms of religious gatherings. Large monasteries in Tibet have been consistently deprived of their traditional key role in the political, economic, and educational spheres. Although many monasteries in various regions of central and eastern Tibet still offer scholastic curricula, the standards of monastic education have decreased considerably.[199] Such a gap has been, however, progressively filled by a resurgence and popularization of other forms of religious gatherings such as quasi-monastic religious encampments and mountain hermitages and activities of spiritual guidance such as charismatic leadership by both celibate and non-celibate personalities.

Contemporary examples of these religious communities are quasi-monastic encampments, known in Tibetan as *sgar* or *chos sgar*, and mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*). Although the monastic populations of these religious communities are less than those of the large monastic estates of the past, a few among them have witnessed peaks of resident population unthinkable in the PRC until a few years ago. The religious-philosophical curricula offered in these encampments are also more appropriate to the new socio-political circumstances. Whereas scholasticism continued to characterize traditional monastic education, in many religious encampments, Tantric ritualism, various systems of contemplation, and a wide range of esoteric practices are the focus of instruction.[200] These religious communities in contemporary Tibet populated not only by Tibetan as well as Han Chinese female and male monastics, but also by lay devotees, have generally grown around highly charismatic religious figures whose scriptural knowledge and contemplative virtuosity are in unison with claims of Treasure revelation and

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monastics in Tibet until 1955 differ considerably when we consider the recent TIN publication of *The Secret Report of the 10th Panchen Lama* (1997: 52) where a total population of 110,000 monks and nuns is reported to exist in all of Tibet. This leads us to surmise that the inclusion of monastics from Khams and A mdo would considerably increase the figure. Furthermore, the same report also provides a figure of 7,000 monastics living in monasteries at the end of 1958, implying that the decrease of monastic population from 1955 to 1958 amounted to 93%.

[199] Goldstein (1998).

[200] For a detailed view of Tibetan classic education, especially within dGe lugs pa schools, please refer to Dreyfus (2003).

visionary endowments. Despite the nearly three decades of stick-and-carrot religious control, religion is not eclipsed in Tibet. The fact that Tibetans embrace alternative ways of religious gathering and dissemination of traditional education is a sign of the necessity to resist the new socio-political circumstances in order to support their cultural legacy.

In recent years the increased visibility of non-celibate Tantric teachers and the flowering of their quasi-monastic religious communities have been the main contributors to the revitalization of religious discourses, ritual praxis, publication of religious material, and scriptural authority in contemporary Tibet. In the reconstitution of Tibetan sacred geography and landscape and in the attempt to re-appropriate specific ritual agendas within the Buddhist sphere of modern Tibet, these non-celibate Tantric teachers have been the central figures. Since the conventional production of Buddhist textual material and its formal study had been under restrictive control by Chinese authorities and biased by contemporary policies of the PRC, visionary and Treasure revelation methods of Buddhist transmission have found a fertile terrain for their diffusion. As shown in the previous chapter, these forms of scriptural legitimacy, charismatic virtuosity, and religious transmission have been developed within both monastic and non-celibate religious communities especially in many areas of eastern Tibet. In the 1990s in regions such as Khams, a certain relaxation towards the application of religious policy has been more evident than elsewhere.[201] In particular, some forms of religious practice such as the visionary, revelatory, and literary activities of rNying ma Treasure revealers have acquired significant visibility in the religious landscape. This is one of the major factors that has contributed to the re-invigoration of religious practice and maintenance of Buddhist identity in today's Tibet. The increasing magnitude of the phenomenon of religious encampments has provoked great concern for Chinese Communist authorities as these large rNying ma religious encampments are hosting enormous resident populations gathered around religious personalities who are not only renowned Buddhist teachers but are also known for being *gter ston*, Treasure revealers.

The many issues regarding Tibet's ancient and recent past raised by both Tibetan and Western analysts have highlighted the legal status of Tibet and its political annexation to China.[202] However, in recent years an increasing numbers of works have appeared in the fields of

[201] Germano (1998: 56).
[202] A general overview of the legal status of Tibet according to Western international law can be provided by van Walt van Praag (1987), and by visiting the website of the Tibet Justice Center at www.tibetjustice.org

religious and social studies that contribute to the understanding of Tibetan religious practices and social life in the face of modernity in the new Sinicized cultural environment. When it comes to the state of religious practice and cultural identity in present-day Tibet some scholars of religions have spoken recently of "cultural revival" and "religious renaissance."[203]

An important observation with regard to religious revivalism in Tibet is that this phenomenon reflects the complexities of Tibetans' attempts to adapt to the new circumstances and their efforts in maintaining and transmitting their cultural heritage. As Goldstein observes:

> […] the matrix of beliefs and practices that comprise Tibetan Buddhism have not been restored to their original state like frozen vegetables defrosted in a microwave oven. Some individual cultural traits have reemerged identical with the past, but others have reappeared somewhat changed, and still others have not reemerged at all. In still other cases, views held by a minority in the old society have now gained prominence. And this process has not been homogeneous throughout the areas where Tibetan Buddhism was practiced. Not only were there historical differences between political and ethnographic Tibet […], but differing local socio-political conditions have also fostered variant adaptations and new complexes of beliefs and practices. Tibetan religion, therefore, has not simply reappeared. Rather, a dynamic process of adaptation has occurred, and is still occurring.[204]

More importantly, as I argue below, the new dynamics of religious practice and community organization, as in the case of Treasure revealers and their hermitages and encampments, are clearly operating under a new system of political control, social surveillance, and ideological pressure. Most current Tibetan religious leaders' attempts to pursue the ideal dynamics of overt religious practices and informal gatherings will inevitably jeopardize Chinese efforts to maintain control over the organization of Buddhist practice in Tibet. When it comes to the connection between religious revival in Tibet and nationalism, such a relationship is not a straightforward one. Difficulties in the analysis of such topics arise when confronted with the complexity of issues of identity and national aspirations in Tibet. Studies on contemporary Tibet, Tibetan nationalism, and manifestations of ethnic identity are increasing and they are mostly concerned with post-Cultural Revolution in Tibet and Tibetan responses to Chinese policies in China.

In the case of Tibetan nationalism, religion and national identity are intimately connected. Being sentiments shared and generated by communities experiencing loss and oppression, nationalism and national identity are political principles usually advocated in response to

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[203] In this regard see, for instance, the influential essays contained in Goldstein and Kapstein (1998). See also Smith (1997: 577-83), where he speaks of "revival of religion, culture and nationalism," which for Tibetans was a "communal experience with inevitable political significance, given the traditional relationship between religion and politics."

[204] Goldstein (1998: 11).

attempts at violation against a state or nation and thus aim at unity of ethic boundaries, culture, religion, and language.[205] However, in this regard Kapstein maintains that the nationalistic aspiration of Tibetans is not to be understood as emerging from religion only. He claims that Tibetan nationalism is the result of Tibetans' aversion to Chinese domination. In his words:

> Despite the struggles and hardships of recent decades, Tibetan national identity remains a potent cultural force in the Tibetan regions of China, and its vitality is powerfully supported by the ongoing revival of traditional Tibetan religious activity. The factors that have encouraged the emergence of genuine nationalism, however, have not grown out of the traditional religion per se; rather, antipathy to Chinese domination as it has developed so far combined with the positive ideal of Tibetan autonomy and freedom, embodied for many in the figure of the Dalai Lama, are probably the key factors here. But the national religion, by offering innumerable reminders of harm done to Tibet under Chinese rule and by accentuating distinctively Tibetan beliefs and values, does underscore both.[206]

According to some scholars, although the Chinese state has embarked on more open thinking about religious affairs, with such regulations of religious activities it nevertheless continues to maintain strong control on the legality and legitimacy of religious organizations.[207] Self-determination activities and separatist activities are often seen as associated with religious activities in ethnic minorities' areas (not only Tibet, but also Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia) and are considered to be a threat to the economic development and internal stability of the country.[208] Therefore, in order to maintain complete control over the country, the Chinese government's political agenda opposes any anti-establishment movement, unregistered religious group, and private religious meeting.[209] The Chinese state guarantees freedom of religious belief and

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[205] In the definition of Gellner (2003: 1), "Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can be best defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of this principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfillment. A nationalist movement is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind."

[206] Kapstein (1998: 148-49).

[207] Hornemann (2005: 40).

[208] In a recent work *Minzu wenti yu zhongguo fazhan* (The Problem of Ethnic Minorities and the Development of China), Chinese political scientist Wu Shimin (2000) provides an insightful view of the situation of ethnic minorities-related problems in the PRC. He writes that one of the main issues concerning the problem of ethnic minorities in today's China is that the situation substantially differs from the problems at the time of the establishment of China in 1910. Furthermore, he provides two specific features related to the problems of ethnic minorities. First, being ethnic minorities that are part of China, whatever problem arises within their communities is an issue of internal affairs and unity is an essential aspect related to ethnic minorities for the Chinese authorities. Second, in contemporary China, the core of ethnic minorities' issues is the problem of development. Wu (2000: 2-5). See also Dreyer (2006: 279-203) and Rossabi (2004).

[209] In 2004, more than one hundred private meeting locations were closed because they were considered offensive to the public opinion, and the religious leaders had to cancel all the religious activities and promise obedience to the "Regulations." Li and Zhang (2005: 67, n. 5).

practice but only accepts "normal clerical activities" and "normal religious activities," concepts that due to their ambiguity can cause several consequences:

> Religious organizations in China run their own affairs independently and set up religious schools, publish religious classics and periodicals, and run social services according to their own needs. As in many other countries, China practices the principle of separating religion from education; religion is not a subject taught in schools of the popular education in China, although some institutions of higher learning and research institutes do teach or conduct research into religion. The various religious schools and institutes set up by the different religious organizations teach religious knowledge in line with their own needs. All normal clerical activities conducted by the clergy and all normal religious activities held either at sites for religious activities or in believers' own homes in accordance with usual religious practices, such as worshipping Buddha, reciting scriptures, going to church, praying, preaching, observing Mass, baptising, monkhood initiation, fasting, celebrating religious festivals, observing extreme unction, and holding memorial ceremonies, are protected by law as the affairs of religious bodies and believers themselves and may not be interfered with.[210]

Despite the more flexible policy changes towards religion and religious practice that the central government has embraced in recent years, the suspicion of the subversive nature of religion has not been washed away. In the attempt to keep internal stability and unity, the central government regularly promulgates rules and regulations to strengthen surveillance over religious organizations, contacts with or influence from Western institutions, and the promotion of Marxist atheist retorics of religious superstition and popular beliefs.[211]

In 2004 a new set of regulations and requirements for religious institutions was promulgated in the PRC in Chinese and other nationalities' languages. Officially released on November 2004, the "Regulations of Religious Affairs" (Ch. *Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli*; Tib. *Chos lugs las don skor gyi srol yig*, henceforth *Regulations*) re-emphasizes the rules concerning the administration of religious bodies and institutions, religious clergy, and religious activities in the PRC.[212] Although the action reflects the Chinese State Council's attempt to regulate religious activities in the country, China analysts from within and outside China have observed that the

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[210] http://www.sara.gov.cn/GB/zgzj/

[211] Hornemann (2005: 40).

[212] The copy in my possession is in Tibetan and was published by the Religious Affairs Bureau of dKar mdzes Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (dKar mrdzes rang skyong khul chos lugs las don cus). It was diffused in eastern Tibet by the end of November 2004 and announced the set of laws published therein was to become effective March 1, 2005. I have seen copies of the *Regulations* in almost every monastery visited in areas of dKar mrdzes and mGo log in eastern Tibet. I have found copies of the *Regulations* in some monasteries and nunneries I visited in the TAR as well in the winter and summer of 2005. Although copies of the *Regulations* have been distributed by local governments in all regions of Tibetan ethinic areas in Tibetan, some regions, such as the TAR, have copies in both Chinese and Tibetan. For an English translation of the *Regulations* see "Newly Promulgated Religious Affairs Provisions" in *Chinese Law and Religion Monitor Journal*, 2005, 2 (April-June), pp. 52-66 and online at http://www.monitorchina.org/images/journals/journal2_e.pdf.

promulgation of the *Regulations* does not provide any improvement on previous laws on the matter.[213] As a matter of fact, with the PRC State Council's new legal emphasis on the registration (Ch. *dengji*) of all religious institutions and activities, more pressure has been put on those "un-registered" religious institutions, which are, therefore, considered illegal in the country."[214] Chinese policy makers perceive anti-establishment groups such as non-state approved religious communities, millenarian sects, and underground movements as acting against the country's interests and therefore as threats to social order that need to be under strict control.[215] Other groups of political dissent in PRC include some ethnic minority communities and disadvantaged socio-economic groups.[216] Today, China's ethnic minorities' (Ch. *shaoshu minzu*) issues are of high priority in the PRC's political agenda. The relationship between religion and ethnic minorities is clear if we consider that the promulgation of the *Regulations* and the general administration of religion in minority ethnic areas is in the hands of the Ethnic and Religious Bureau (Ch. *minzongju*).[217]

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[213] Hornemann (2005), Jiang (2005), Wang (2005), Li and Zhang (2005).

[214] *Chinese Law and Religion Monitor*, 2005, 2 (April-June), pp. 2-3.

[215] In this regard see MacInnis (1972, 1989), Pas (1989), and Luo (1991). For a survey of Chinese state policy on religion see Potter (2003), Leung (1995; 2005), and Spiegel (1997; 2004).

[216] It is worth remembering in this context that one of the highest profile anti-CCP forms of dissent over the decade has been the *Falun gong* cult. The movement has attracted adherents inside and outside China. Chinese authorities have responded with severe measures, arresting and imprisoning thousands of citizens in the country. Western human rights groups attack China on the basis of religious intolerance and human rights abuses. Despite the magnitude of the movement, some analysts claim that the *Falun gong* lacks a solid and well-organized structure inside PRC and that its religious and spiritual claims are considered controversial since its founder Li Hongzhi has no real mass support among the population (Schechter 2000: 3-5). Therefore, this might mean that the *Falun gong* movement fails to pose a serious challenge to the government. Nevertheless in 1999 the PRC proclaimed *Falun gong* an illegal religious cult and banned its practice. See Chang (2001: 17-25) and Schechter (2000). A useful help in the study of the *Falun Gong* phenomenon in China is Berend ter Haar's website *Falung Gong* at http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/bth/falun.htm. Also, for economic reasons, another wave of dissent is challenging the Chinese government. The rapid economic transformations produced in the PRC during the last decade have opened vast opportunities but at the same time they have greatly increased uncertainty and insecurity. Unemployment, industrial workers' and farmers' discontent all pose serious problems to the Chinese leadership. Industrial as well as rural areas have witnessed a growth in social unrest due to the hardships in struggling to cope with the changes in the Chinese economy.

[217] Today a large amount of information related to PRC state policy and internal affairs can be accessed via the Internet by visiting, for instance, the official website of the PRC in English: http://www.china.org.cn/english. For specific issues related to ethnic minorities (Ch. *shaoshu minzu*) of the PRC see also www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu/index.htm. As for Tibet, a significant amount of information on Tibetans and Tibet is available on Chinese websites run by PRC government authorities and other associated entities. Most of them are directed to Chinese readers within the PRC, although a number among them also provide English language pages. See, for instance, http://www.tibetinfor.com.cn/english and China's Tibet Facts and Figures 2002 at http://www.china.org.cn/english/tibet-english.htm. The Tibet Information Network (TIN) has recently produced a detail special report on the portrayal of Tibetans and Tibet on Chinese state sponsored websites in the PRC, "China's Tibet Online: Tibet and Tibetans in PRC Government Websites", available at http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-update/2003/websr/0309.htm

Tight control by the PRC government over religious expression, in particular any organized form of religious practice, is present at all levels of local authority in Tibet today. In asserting their control, central and local government authorities use a variety of measures such as limiting population in monasteries and nunneries, securing political allegiance of monastic candidates, restricting enrollment to people who are 18 years old or older, truncating monastic education, dictating selection of monastic leaders, outlawing of traditional religious rituals, prohibiting Tibetan Party members and government workers to practice any form of religion, and requiring political indoctrination in monasteries and nunneries.[218] The PRC's control on religion and religious activities in China, as well as in Tibet, has been focused on various issues that reflect the overall concern of the central government's ideological rationale: a Marxism-based atheist viewpoint. Additionally, major emphasis was put on the necessity to update the education system, which in Tibet was predominantly religious and therefore seen as backward and not in harmony with social progress and human development. As a consequence, monasteries, nunneries, and other religious educational institutions, where monks and nuns are educated and trained, have been the object of surveillance and revision because of their role as traditional education organizations. As a number of scholars have pointed out, the sense is that the rules and regulations concerning religious affairs in the PRC have been promulgated to support the central government's political plans rather than to protect human rights.[219]

One of the major forms of control is the onerous requirement that all religious organizations, and especially education institutions, need to be state-approved in order to operate.[220] This control continues to this day. In their quest to reorganize religious activities and especially to revitalize traditional religious education, Tibetans have been forced to look elsewhere for religious authority and culture in their land. This ongoing process is particularly evident in peripheral areas of Tibet, namely Khams, where charismatic forms of spiritual leadership and the role of religious encampments and non-monastic communities as centers of religious education and learning are demonstrations of resistance against the state's repression of religious activities and adaptation to the new political order. Due to their loose organizational structure and lack of systematic forms of administration, financial accounting, resident

[218] Academic research on this topic is scarce. In contrast, they are priority concern for human rights organizations. For a detailed report on Chinese control in Tibet was published by the Tibet Information Network and Human Rights Watch/Asia, *Cutting Off the Serpent's Head: Tightening Control on Tibet 1994-1995*, (1996).
[219] Jiang Shihua (2005); Joshua Wang (2005); Hornemann (2005).
[220] See Article 15 of the "Newly Promulgated Religious Affairs Provisions," *Chinese Law & Religious Monitor* (2005: 57). Hornemann (2005: 43).

population, or enrollment system, these usually succeed in avoiding any formal registration with the local registration authority (Ch. *dengji guangli*), thus largely precluding any major involvent of the government in the internal affairs of the community. Furthermore, religious monastic institutions in the PRC report directly to the government's Religious Affairs Bureau (Ch. *zongjiaoju*) while non-monastic communities report to local authorities, who, in the case of Tibetan areas, are usually low-level Tibetan cadres and Public Security Bureau (Ch. *gonganju*) officials. These are often either devotees to the local Tibetan lama or are at least ready to apply some toleration to the religious practices in the area.

In the general climate of the revision of policies towards religion, in 1982, a new state Constitution was issued and a specific article, Article 36, was established to accommodate the practice of religion and religious belief.[221] With the adoption of a new State constitution in 1982, religious practice received renewed attention and specific definitions were provided to clarify the State position concerning the practice of religion. It was also at this time that religion became more accepted in terms of a state policy and the specific policies set down by the Constitution had a major affect on all religious movements in China.[222] As for Tibetan religions, the impact of this new law resulted in the central and local state concession to restore monasteries and religious sites, as well as the re-appropriation of popular religious practices. At the time, this shift in state-led religious policy was perceived by the populace with due hesitation and scepticism. With the burgeoning domestic and international tourist industry, monasteries, temples, and also colorful regional folk and religious festivals have been turned into lucrative tourist attractions.[223]

The PRC's relaxation of its grip on religious institutions and practitioners which began in the 1980s set the stage for Tibetans' steady reconnection with their past, their cultural lore, and traditional forms of religious education. Sacred religious sites began to be visited again and monasteries allowed restoration, repair, and in many cases reconstruction. Pilgrimage,

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[221] The law concerning freedom of religion was included in all Constitutions of the PRC since its foundation in 1949. A law concerning freedom of religious belief and protection of legitimate religious practice was specifically included in the Article 36 of the state Constitution established in 1982. See MacInnis (1989). See also Potter (2003) and Leung (1995, 2006). For a general overview of the religious policy of the PRC and the 1982 State Constitution see also Stockwell (1993) and TIN (1999). A series of articles and reports on the religious policy of the PRC and its repercussions for Tibet are accessible on the Internet. See for instance the Tibet Information Network website: www.tibetinfo.org and the International Campaign for Tibet: www.savetibet.org.
[222] See MacInnis (1989), Luo (1991), and Spiegel (1997; 2004) for an overview of the Chinese religious policy and state of religion in the PRC.
[223] A case study about the results of these policies in Tibetan regions of the PRC is the TIN's *Relative Freedom?* (1999). See. also Marshall (1997).

circumambulation, and popular religious practices were restored. Abandoned rituals such as visiting and making offerings at monasteries and temples, prostrations, worships of deities, and local cults were reintroduced. It should be noted that while these popular forms of religious practice were allowed, the same degree of concession in terms of practice and ritual performance was not always given to institutionalized forms of Buddhism such as monasticism.[224] Certainly this resurgence of popular religious activity also extended to the re-appropriation of other religious traditions such as the *sprul sku* tradition, Treasure revelation, and charismatic healing practices.[225] Many Tibet scholars agree that while Buddhism is one of the fundamental elements of Tibetans' sense of cultural identity, only recently Tibetans have begun to experience a nationalistic spirit only recently as a consequence of the dramatic events associated with the annexation to thr PRC, the flight of the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959, and the politics of exile.[226] The Dharamsala-based Tibetan government in exile points out that the union of religion and politics (*chos srid zung 'brel*) was the right way to rule their own country.[227] The government of the PRC is aware of this aspect of the Tibetan culture and sees it as a real threat to its authority. Smith has pointed out how a resurgence of religious fervor in Tibet is indeed perceived by the CCP as a political threat.[228] Mass religious activities and the presence of leading and influential religious personalities are still frowned upon and strictly controlled by Chinese authorities. In particular CCP party leaders see mass gatherings and charismatic religious leaders as potential

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[224] Smith (1997: 578).

[225] In 2000-2001, during one of my fieldwork trips in sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP) I was often told stories about a Tibetan religious figure known by the name of mTshams pa sGrub thob. People told me he used to live around gSer thal in Khams and that he was known for his healing skills and his therapeutic assistance to people. He was particularly known for his ability to remove tumors and to heal internal infections by placing his hands on the patient without any use of surgical tools. He used to see his patients at his home, but he would also travel around in Khams when people needed his help. His fame was widespread in sKye rgu mdo, where pictures of him were available in the market stands. Pictures could be found portraying him alone and also together with other major religious personalities such as mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan. I was told that he passed away in the fall of 2001 while traveling in sKye rgu mdo. Regarding healing powers, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and bKra shis rgyal mtshan are also known for the power of their breath and saliva, which is blown on wounds and affected areas of ill people, such as skin infections and muscle pains. At the patients request, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje or bKra shis rgyal mtshan would blow or in some cases spit water from his mouth on the infected, wounded, or painful area of the body.

[226] See for instance Blondeau (2001), Smith (1997: 579), and Dreyfus (1994, 1995, 1998, 1999).

[227] "Buddhism flourished in Tibet in the seventh century. Receiving royal patronage, it spread throughout Tibet. With the assumption of power by the Dalai Lamas from 1642 onwards, with the rule of the fifth Dalai lama Nga dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, the era of 'the harmonious blend of religion and politics' (*chos srid zung 'brel*) was established in Tibet. Since then, for three-and-a-half centuries, ten successive Dalai Lamas have been the spiritual and temporary rulers of Tibet." See "Religion and National Identity" at http://www.tibet.com/WhitePaper/index.html.

[228] Smith (1997: 578).

triggers for "counterrevolutionary" and separatist activities, destruction of Communism, and claims to self-determination.

The reassertion of religious practice and activities in Khams in the mid-1980s and the number of monasteries, nunneries, and temples that were restored and opened at the same time produced an unexpected growth in numbers of monks and nuns. This revival of religious practice in eastern Tibet combined with the undeterred resistance to eliminate the religious and political image of the Dalai Lama worry the Chinese authorities, who consider this part of Tibetan nationalist claims and a threat to Chinese internal unity.[229]

## *Resurgence of Traditional Icons: Ge sar and the Treasures*

The charismatic leadership and the popularization of the *chos sgar* in eastern Tibet today are associated with religious personalities' prophetic visionary activities and Treasure revelation. As we have already briefly seen above, most of the *chos sgar* leaders claim to be Treasure revealers (*gter ston*): most of them are known for having retrieved several *gter ma* items and multiple volumes of Tantric teachings. Revelations, especially when public, have generated widespread popularity for such leaders across the Tibetan plateau and China alike.

Every Treasure revealer claims that their revelation is a memory. As a memory, it is therefore a reconnection to the past Tibet, which renews an ideal link to the "golden age" of Imperial Tibet (sixth to ninth century), the origins of the diffusion of Buddhist teachings in the country. Given the overarching concern by *gter ston* with psycho-mnemonic investments, which underlie political confrontations, it is quite significant that the narrative of the Treasure tradition in Tibet grants so privileged a place to such revelations and discoveries. Although there seems to be no apparently systematic association in Treasure literature between *gter ma* revelation (*gter 'don*/*gter bzhes*) and memory (*dran pa*), the regular presence of Tibet's imperial past to valorize the *gter* discourse provides nevertheless evidence of the use of a historical memory in the construction of legitimacy and authority.[230]

[229] Smith (1997: 577).

[230] Gyatso (1986) and Kapstein (1992) have discussed the notion of *dran pa* in Tibetan Tantric literature. Terms such as *dran pa*, "memory", and *dran* related words, for instance, are abundantly attested in the literature of the *rdzogs chen* (Great Perfection), which is itself closely related to the *gter ma* tradition. Dreyfus (1998: 29-30) also emphasizes the mnemonic nature of Treasure texts observing that the rNying ma tradition assigns a privileged status to Treasure texts as reminiscences of historical events.

Treasures in their forms both as sacred objects and doctrinal scriptures are first of all a source of religious identity for present eastern Tibetans.[231] As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the narrative concerning the origin of the *gter ma* concealment and the emergence of the early *gter ston* is associated with a specific historical period and the recognition of specific individuals as founders and promulgators of Buddhism on the Tibetan plateau. More importantly the whole tradition reconnects to an ideal era of Tibetan political and cultural dominance, which is the source of pride and historical significance to the Tibetan community. Therefore, the implied association of an idealized glorious past involved in the *gter ma* revelation tradition becomes a legitimacy device used to underscore the subjective claim to religious authority and power. Indeed the *gter ston*, as an incarnate person, is believed to be able to perform mnemonic feats that enable him to recollect pivotal historical events from his previous lives and places where these events and specific actions, such as the concealment of Treasure caskets or the delivery of Treasure teachings took place. From the Tibetan point of view, the Treasure revealer, therefore, has the power to reconnect himself to the glorious past and the saintly people who contributed to the dissemination of Buddhism in the land, thus making the *gter ston* a *de facto* messenger (*pho nya*) and representative (*sku tshab*) of those religious personages who taught in the eighth century.

Some scholars have pointed out aspects of Treasure literature, such as the association between Buddhist teachings and Tibetan religious and political figures of the past developed in Treasure narratives, emperor Srong btsan sgam po with the *Maṇi bka’ ’bum* and emperor Khri srong lde’u btsan in the *Padma bka’ thang*, as particularly relevant for their nationalist underpinnings.[232] This link between roysl figures and Treasures provides ground to the legitimacy claims advanced by the rNying ma tradition for its doctrinal corpus. Much of the cultural identity expressed with the revelations of Treasures is nostalgically linked to the memory of those times when Tibet was powerful and independent, when religious kings (*chos rgyal*) ruled the country, and when the Buddhist teachings contributed to the civilization of Tibet.[233]

The peculiarity of today’s Tibetan nationalism is its religious nature. As Dreyfus explains, what is relevant to the identification of Tibetan nationalism, or “*proto nationalism*,” to

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[231] Dreyfus (1998: 32).
[232] Dreyfus (1998); Tucci (1949: 112).
[233] Dreyfus (1998: 36).

the opposition to Chinese dominance and to the defense of its collective identity is the traditional sense of identity in the formation of a modern nationalism. He argues that:

> The particularity of the nationalism that emerged in Tibet in the 1950s is that it deploys traditional religious themes to define the nation. Instead of adopting the secular lingua usually associated with modern nationalism, this nationalism defines the Tibetan nation using traditional Buddhist values such as compassion, karma, and the bond between Tibetans and Avalokiteshvara. The nation thus defined is not, however, traditional Tibet with its diversity of local cultural, social and political communities, but a modern country united by its opposition to Chinese oppression.[234]

Indeed following the resurgence of some Tibetan religious practices, other expressions of traditional culture have received renewed attention and consideration in the PRC. One of the Tibetan cultural phenomena associated with the partial resurgence of Tibetan culture is, for instance, the massive interest in the Tibetan epic of Ge sar of gLing, the heroic tale so popular among many Tibetans, especially in the eastern regions of Khams and A mdo. Among the oldest and longest epic poems in the world, the epic of Ge sar, usually referred to in Tibetan simply as "the epic" (*sgrung*), tells the stories and adventures of the great hero Ge sar, who ruled the legendary land of gLing.[235] The epic is rich in historical and religious elements linked to Imperial Tibet, early kings, Padmasambhava, and the diffusion of Buddhism in the land of snows. Nationalistic, if not patriotic, overtones also abound in the epic since King Ge sar's main preoccupation and the core of the epic is fighting enemies often represented by Hor tribes of Mongolian descent and thus seen as foreign aggressors. The epic of Ge sar belongs to the oral tradition and as such has many similarities with Treasure revelation. The Ge sar story-tellers (*sgrung babs*, *sgrung mkhan*) are inspired singers believed to gain access to the epic by visionary means.[236]

Although the epic has always played an essential role in the cultural life especially for eastern Tibetans in the last decade, Chinese Tibetological circles have showed great interest in Ge sar literature.[237] The PRC government treats the diffusion of Ge sar literature ambiguously. Many Chinese scholars of Tibetan culture focus on the study and publication of episodes of the epic, developing study groups and study centers, such as the King Ge sar Study Center of the

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[234] Dreyfus (2002: 42).
[235] Stoddard (1996: 144).
[236] See Samuel (1992).
[237] Stoddard (1996: 143-44).

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Chinese scholars have made significant efforts to promote the diffusion of the epic in Tibet, China, and abroad in the last decades.[238]

Despite the literary value of the epic, the figure of Ge sar is also an object of devotion among Tibetans and is associated with a specific set of rituals and practices. The specific rituals associated with Ge sar and other mountain cults are secular and religious like most Tibetan cultural manifestations.[239] The debate on Ge sar of gLing in Tibetan literature is pertinent to this study for two main reasons. First, as just mentioned, the mythic figure of Ge sar is intimately connected with Tibet's imperial past and is considered to be a major catalyst of collective identity.[240] Secondly, the relevance of the phenomenon "Ge sar" in Tibetan culture today is visible not only on a regional level with events such as festivals, dances, itinerant story-tellers, and the publication of episodes from the epic, but also in the presence, for instance, of forms of liturgies and offering and invocation rituals (*gsol mchod*) dedicated to Ge sar as a deity and largely produced through Treasure revelation. Although the composition and visionary revelation of liturgical material dedicated to Ge sar is attested among various scholars of the past, recently such an activity has been reasserted by many Treasure revealers in different parts of eastern Tibet.[241] Historically, Ge sar has been also closely associated with religious movements. In nineteenth-century Tibet, for instance, the *ris med* movement turned to Ge sar when the movement's main supporters, 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899), 'Jam

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[238] See Stoddard (1996: 143-44, 147). For an idea of the magnitude of Chinese interests in Ge sar epic see also "Research into Literature and Art" in *Development in Tibetan Studies* at the official website, www.tibet.cn/tibetzt-en/zxyj/01/01_03.htm and the official Chinese web-site on "King Gesar" at http://www.tibetinfor.com.cn/tibetzt/gesaer_en/doc/1000.htm. An International Academic Seminar on The Life of King Gesar is held regularly in the PRC, which started in 1989, and an academic journal *Zhongguo Ge sa'er* (China's Gesar) is published in Chinese.

[239] Karmay observes that the Ge sar epic literature and the mountain cult are two forms of secular and not religious traditions. According to Karmay's own investigations, both the Ge sar epic and the mountain cult play a central role in the maintenance of collective identity in Khams and A mdo areas of Tibet, where, however, they are often kept distinct from Buddhist involvements (1996: 114-15).

[240] See Karmay (1994), and Dreyfus (1998).

[241] 'Ju mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912) for instance produced a collection of liturgical compositions dedicated to Ge sar in his *gLing ge sar rgyal po'i gsol mchod skor phyogs bsgrigs* and likewise did 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899) with a offering ritual (*gsol mchod*) to the deity Ge sar with his *sKu rje ge sar bsangs mchod dgos 'dod char 'bebs*. Treasure revealers too have been quite productive in the revelations of Ge sar related scriptures. One example is that of Nam mkha' dri med rab 'byams rin po che (b. 1939) who revealed and entire cycle of Treasure scriptured about Ge sar titled *Nam mkha' dri med rab 'byams rin po chei dgongs gter gling rje ge sar gyi sgrub skor*. In the contemporary sphere a number of Treasure revealers have produced various materials related to Ge sar both in liturgical and earth Treasure forms. Among the *gter ston* are bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and sKu gsum gling pa.

dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po (1820-1892), and ’Ju mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912), chose this heroic figure as one of the main symbols of their cultural campaign.[242]

The popularity of the epic of Ge sar is evident in almost all regions of Tibet where pictorial reproductions of King Ge sar on *thang ka* painting scrolls and books and audiobooks of episodes from the epic, in both Tibetan and/or Chinese, can be found on shelves of bookstores, in village market stalls, and in shops. However, it is particularly in the societies of eastern Tibet that Ge sar’s legendary deeds have found fertile soil for the development of a significant oral and written tradition. As Samuel observes, the Ge sar epic has strong connections with many aspects of society in Khams and A mdo, where episodes have been produced in great number in more manuscripts than in any other area of Tibet.[243]

The iconic presence of Ge sar in the imagery of Tibetan Treasure revealers is visible in the frequent associations claimed by contemporary *gter ston*s with the hero of the epic, such as in the case of mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs.[244] mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs claimed to remember a previous incarnation as the son of a general associated with Ge sar of gLing. On many occasions, especially during public teaching sessions, he also performed offering rituals, prayers, and blessings from liturgical material related to Ge sar.[245] The incorporation of Ge sar within Tibetan Buddhist Tantric rituals and devotional procedures of Tibetan Buddhism is a fascinating topic of investigation, and Ge sar in his deistic form continues to be associated with religion even in present-day Tibet in such works as offering rituals (*gsol mchod*). This is the case for another Treasure revealer who lived in mGo log, the late O rgyan sku gsum gling pa (1933-2009) whose most representative Treasure was apparently the “Gesar of Ling Empowerment.”[246]

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, as we shall see in detail in the Chapter Four, not only claims to have been recognized as the reincarnation of the personal assistant and physician (*lha rje*) of Ge sar of gLing, Kun dga’ nyi ma, who accompanied the hero into many battles, but also has revealed scriptures, liturgies, and offering rituals of Ge sar. Interestingly, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje claims to have had access to many episodes and stories of Ge sar through visionary means

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[242] Dreyfus (1998: 43).
[243] Samuel (1992: 711-12, 718). See also Stein (1959: 5).
[244] Germano (1998) has commented on such claims by mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs, one of the major *gter ston*s today active in Tibet.
[245] Germano (1998: 58-59). It is important to note here that religious figures are not the only individuals to claim descent from Ge sar or from personalities of his entourage. As Samuel observes (1992: 716), many important Khams families, such as that of gLing tshang, the most dominant state in Khams in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries before sDe dge state took power, have claimed direct descent from Ge sar or other characters in the epic.
[246] http://www.omura.com/k_lingpa/Klingpa2.htm

that he considers elements connecting him to his past life close to Ge sar. However, despite the value that for many Tibetans such an undertaking would mean, he rje has never been interested in recording his recollections as he does not consider himself a Ge sar storyteller.[247]

Treasure revelation and the epic of Ge sar are potent signs of cultural identity in that they both pertain to the sphere of memory. Dreyfus has observed that in Tibet issues of religious nationalism, such as identity and memory, are strictly associated with the symbolic power of *gter ma* revelation, a conviction already expressed by Tucci, and Ge sar's epic. Dreyfus maintains that prior to 1959, the Tibetans' sense of belonging to a distinct country was epitomized by the shared memories associated with the discoveries of Treasure texts such as the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*.[248] He additionally remarks that Ge sar of gLing can be considered a powerful symbol of collective identity and Tibetan nationalism since Ge sar not only belongs to a cluster of heroic figures from a mythic golden age Tibet, but he also represents a model defining a sense of community among Tibetans.[249] Such views, though, do not convince Blondeau whose response to Dreyfus's observations is quite pungent, especially with regard to the Treasure tradition. Not only does she claim that Tibetans developed a sense of nationalism only after the dramatic events related to the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the flight of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, and the development of the Tibetan community in exile, but she also believes that there is no ground for such affirmations as the glorification of a sense of nationalism contained in Treasure texts. She affirms that a detailed analysis of early texts, such as the *Zangs gling ma* and the *Maṇi bka' 'bum* would be enough to prove that their version of the legendary history of the imperial era is not meant to glorify the conquests and the political successes of the early emperors and kings, but rather their actions towards the diffusion of Buddhism in the land and the conversions of their subjects.[250]

Although general remarks about issues of cultural identity and religious practice can be made concerning Tibet as an overall entity, we should keep in mind that much of the situation varies from region to region. According to my experience, there are areas of Khams and A mdo

[247] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal communication. gNas chen Padma shel ri Hermitage, August 1998. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, has discovered two important texts related to Ge sar. One is the *Ge sar sgo nas sba lcag bsgrub pa'i gter mdzod*, a ritual dedicated to Ge sar for the request to improve and prolong life. Another text is the *Ge sar gsol mchod*, a ritual of offerings and invocations to Gesar. It is worth noting here that among bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's claims, there is also the ability to reveal entire episodes of Ge sar's epic. However the revelation of Ge sar's epic is not the major focus of his activity, which is rather the transmission of Buddhism. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. gNas chen Padma shel ri ri khrod, sKye rgu mdo, Qinghai, 1998.
[248] Dreyfus (2002: 39).
[249] Dreyfus (1998: 40-47).
[250] Blondeau (2001: 116-119).

where direct contact between Tibetan herdsmen, Han settlers, and government officials can still be rather infrequent since local secular and religious life is predominantly located relatively far from the modern Sinicized urban settlements. For instance, despite the increasing presence in areas of Khams of Chinese cultural elements, architectural influences, political and administrative control, and military settlements, expressions of local Tibetan culture and customs can be easily observed. Tibetan culture seems to be "less under threat" in marginal areas of Tibet, especially compared to the TAR.[251] We should remember also that Khams and A mdo identities, although marked by a shared sentiment of belonging to an idealized Tibet, have nevertheless attempted on many occasions to distance themselves from a hierarchical and centralized political and religious power that once dominated central Tibet and some peripheral areas of eastern Tibet (such as Chab mdo). It is in such a context that the popularization of religious cults such as Ge sar and Treasures can be seen as reassertions of identity and continuation of cultural legacy.

## *Treasure Revealers, Religious Encampments, and Mountain Hermitages*

As briefly noted above, one of the major religious phenomena contributing to the current resurgence of Buddhism in Tibetan areas of Khams and in parts of A mdo, is the popularization of religious centers called *chos sgar*, or religious encampments, hosting both monastic and non-celibate residents.[252] As we shall see in this section, these large religious encampments, like mountain retreats and hermitages, feature vibrant religious practices and increasing population and are intimately associated with contemporary Treasure revealers.

Although religious encampments (*chos sgar*) already existed in pre-modern Tibet, they have acquired renewed value in the present context. Non-monastic religious gatherings existed in concert with monasteries and nunneries in the past. One of the most organized forms of such religious encampments was the *chos tshogs sgar chen*, organized by the Karma bKa' brgyud between the late-fourteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. These large encampments developed around some bKa' brgyud leaders from the large crowds of pilgrims including clergy

[251] Marshall describes the situation of sKye rgu mdo (Ch. Yu shu) as place where "Tibetan culture is less under threat than in other places" despite the presence of the Chinese government and non-Tibetan settlers (1997: 2379-2380).
[252] Dreyfus (2003: 83).

and lay people, coming from afar to enjoy the spiritual presence of the masters and to receive teachings and empowerments. According to Thub bstan phun tshogs, the tradition of the *Karma pa'i chos tshogs sgar chen* originated in the period of the Fourth Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340-1383). These earlier encampments were known by the name of *Karma pa'i chos tshogs sgar chen 'dzam gling rgyan* (The Jewel of the World or the Great Buddhist Encampments of the Karma pa), or simply *chos sgar* (religious encampment).[253] Rol pa'i rdo rje's role in these large Buddhist congregations was as seminal as it was unexpected. Apparently, the first large *chos sgar* developed around him in the late 1360s in the immediate aftermath of his return to mTshur phu after years spent at the court of the last emperor of Yuan China, the Mongol Toghon Temur (1333-1387). Thousands of pilgrims, devotees both non-celibate and monastic from Khams, A mdo, and Mongolia, joined the Karma pa's entourage on his way to mTshur phu and settled down around him, many eager to work and attende to his needs, all striving for religious practice, advice, and teachings.[254]

The tradition of the *sgar chen* continued with, and was further developed by, Rol pa'i rdo rje's successors. It was especially De bzhin gshegs pa (1384-1415) who engaged more actively in the organization of the *sgar chen* community. After having spent a few years in China at the court of the Ming emperor Yong Le (1402-1424), in 1407 he returned to Tibet. Just like his predecessor, his fame spread enormously and devotees arrived from all over Tibet to meet him in mTshur phu and stay close to him. The privilege of residing at the *sgar chen* grew considerably and in order to solve disciplinary issues that could cause chaos at the encampment, the De bzhin gshegs pa was forced to elaborate monastic regulations (*bca' khrims*) for the resident community.[255] The sixth Karma pa mThong ba don ldan (1416-1453) put more emphasis on the education system at the *sgar chen,* which was greatly expanded and included diverse disciplines, such as mechanical and medical arts and grammatical treatises (*bzo gso sgra tshad*), textual commentaries, and the study of the bKa' 'gyur. Attention was also devoted to the exposition and study of the Tantric texts. At the *sgar chen* mThong ba don ldan would bestow empowerments of, and personally compose rituals and textual commentaries on, various deities such as Vajradhātu, Chakrasaṃvara, and Vajrayoginī.

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[253] Thub bstan phun tshogs (1993).
[254] Thub bstan phun tshogs (1993: 55-56).
[255] Thub bstan phun tshogs (1993: 57).

It was, however, with the seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454-1506) that attempts were made to better regulate the life, administration, and religious practices at the *Karma pa'i chos tshogs sgar chen*. A system of regulations (*sgrig srol*) for both resident monastics and laypeople was finally produced. Under the support and patronage of the Ming emperor Chen Hua (1464-1487), who was a devotee and patron of the sixth Karma pa, the privileges and living conditions at the *sgar chen* developed to such a great extent that regulations (*srung bya*) and discipline (*sgrig khrims*) were fixed and a new structure was elaborated for the religious encampment. For instance, monk officials (*las sne*) wore a work hat (*las zhwa*) and work robes (*las gos*) to be distinguished according to their rank. Similarly, the non-celibate resident population who was asked to wear an encampment robe with a matching encampment hat (*zhwa gos*).[256]

Although today's religious encampments generally seem to bear similarities with the *chos tshogs sgar chen* of the Karma pas in terms of structure and internal life, it is especially the idea of gathering around an extraordinary Buddhist teacher and benefiting from a communal lifestyle centered in the charismatic presence of a master that make these institutions comparable to the original *chos tshogs sgar chen*. Today's *chos sgar*, however, are also manifestations of the devotees' need for religious institutions that reproduce traditional styles of formal instruction and religious practice. The social impact that *chos sgar* have on the local populace is particularly evident in some areas of Khams and A mdo, such as sKye rgu mdo, dKar mdzes, and mGo log.[257] Although the *chos sgar* are not well-defined entities and structural and organizational features can vary from encampment to encampment, they are particularly interesting for a number of reasons.

First, the majority of the currently active *sgar* in Khams are institutions that largely represent rNying ma lineages with an educational approach that tends to be as inclusive of major scholastic trends and contemplation systems as possible. Therefore, most *chos sgar* today strive to offer a heterogeneous curriculum and an ecumenical style of instruction drawing on teachings from the all major schools of Tibetan Buddhism.[258] This tendency reflects, as we have seen in the

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[256] Thub bstan phun tshogs (1993: 57-58).
[257] Much of the information below has been gathered during fieldwork sojourns carried out in various parts of the Yushu TAP between 1998 and 2001. See Introduction in this volume for further details.
[258] I am not aware of religious encampments in today's Tibet other than rNying ma in their scholastic affiliation that are official called *sgar*. It is difficult to provide exact figures about *sgar* settlements in today's Tibet. The term *sgar* is often used in the common parlance to address relatively large communities of monks and nuns living in monastic-like encampments developed around a charismatic religious leader. In Tibet I was told that there are a few more

previous chapter, the continuation of the eighteenth-century predominantly rNying ma school's interests in a non-sectarian (*ris med*) approach encouraging the study and the diffusion of Buddhist teachings in a largely ecumenical landscape. A number of these religious centers have become key religious and social institutions that are nowadays pivotal in producing religion.

Second, as mentioned above, the founders of the *chos sgar* and the heads of many *ri khrod* are influential religious leaders and Treasure revealers. The leaders of the *chos sgar* and of many *ri khrod* currently active in Tibet claim for themselves the endowment of charismatic powers, which become manifest predominantly as visionary revelations and discovery of Treasure objects. Although Treasure revelations and visionary activities act as additional qualities to some Buddhist masters principally known for their erudition and spiritual stature, revelation is the paramount activity of others.

Third, the religious communities such as *chos sgar* and *ri khrod* alike provide the loci for expressing enduring moral and ethical values and desires such as hosting diverse communities and mutual support. This is especially true if we consider that these centers host a diversified resident population of both monastic and non-celibate practitioners and devotees. Due to the more flexible organization structure that these centers embrace, most *chos sgar* distinguish themselves from monasteries by being a place where self-supporting lay practitioners engage with monastics.

Fourth, moved by shifting priorities largely based on economic factors, the local state is compelled to regulate and sometime to profit from the *chos sgar* and *ri khrod* rather than suppress their religious activities. This gives the religious centers the opportunity to thrive and to become valuable economic and symbolic resources for the local intelligentsia and political activists. Despite the obvious growth that these religious encampments and mountain hermitages are experiencing in Tibet today, these centers are nevertheless vulnerable to the changing attitudes of the central but above all the local political leaders. Often the same authorities who support or tolerate the very existence of the religious institutions are the ones who carry out crackdown campaigns on them.

In the last two decades the revelation of *gter ma* items, especially in their most spectacular and dramatic form, the discovery and extraction of religious objects from locales in

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centers mainly belonging to the bKa' brgyud and bKa' rNying traditions in Khams that correspond to such a description. But I am unable to provide detailed information about these Buddhist centers here. However, as also reported in a few essays on the subject (Germano 1998, TCHRD 2001), most *sgar*s also provide general curricula, which enhance both rNying ma and non-rNying ma studies.

public events, has been a powerful catalyst of devotion and admiration for enormous sections of the populace. This phenomenon, as we shall see below, is not contained within Tibet only, but has gained the attention of Chinese practitioners outside Tibet as well such as Han Buddhist devotees who arrive in Tibetan areas to study with Tibetan masters at their communities.[259] The renewed popularity of charismatic forms of spiritual guidance inspired by Treasure revealers' activities over the last two decades includes public revelations (*'khrom gter*) as well as the opening of new "hidden valleys" (*sbas yul*), pilgrimage sites (*gnas*), and the establishment of large religious encampments (*sgar chen*) and mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) have acquired renewed meaning. These are among the most striking indications of the attempt by some active and influential Tibetan Buddhist leaders to reaffirm their sense of cultural identity and loyalty to their religious community.

Within such a socio-political context, in certain regions of today's Tibet such as Khams and parts of A mdo, charismatic religious figures functioning independently and outside traditional formal religious institutions of monasteries have gained strong support from the people. Although often this has happened where historically religious authority rested with a central monastic authority, today the majority of non-celibate Buddhist leaders perform their religious activities in mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) and religious encampments (*chos sgar*) such as the rNying ma establishments of sNyan lung sgar, the Buddhist community established by Nam sprul 'Jigs med phun tshogs and the Tsung sgar hermitage, led by Rig 'dzin nyi ma both located in sNyan lung near gSer rta in mGo log. Religious encampments often interact and overlap with formal monasteries, thus encouraging mobility and exchange in term of resident population, instruction programs, and teachers. Most hermitages and mountain retreats house a relatively small number of residents, but the same can not be said of some of the religious encampments currently active in eastern Tibet, the largest of which can easily house thousands of individuals such as bLa rung sgar, Ya chen sgar, and Lung sngon sgar.[260]

The state of religious practice and the survival of these encampments, however, are complex because the application of religious policies changes from place to place in Tibet. The popularity gained by the religious encampments that are active in northeastern Tibet today and the fame achieved by their influential religious leaders preoccupies the central and local

[259] Birnbaum (2003), Terrone (Forthcoming).
[260] mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs' bLa rung sgar is known by a various other names. The hermitage is known as *gSang chen 'od skur grol ba'i dben khrod*. In 1985 the school was known by the name of *bLa rung chos slob sa*. The official name is *gSer rta bla rung lnga rig nang bstan slob gling* after the formal founding of the institution in 1987

authorities. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, the 2001 dramatic crackdowns on the most populated and renowned *chos sgar* in Khams are reflections of the central government's concerns about mass religious gatherings and their related large-scale activities as they might be potential threats to the internal stability in China. The vulnerability of religious institutions, as well as the practice of religion in Tibet in general, lies in the fact that their very existence is subject to the political whims of the local political authorities.[261]

Fifth, there is practically no formal admission to or enrolment in the encampment for monks and nuns. In recent years local authorities have been particularly sensitive to the resident population of *sgar*. However, despite the absence of clear regulations regarding the number of monastics who can live at non-monastic centers, housing and the building of monastic quarters is severily prohibited in many encampments such as bLa rung sgar and Ya chen sgar. Usually monastics join an existing group of monks or nuns led by a *mkhan po*, or seminary teacher, in charge of a specific group of students of a specific discipline. In the case of bLa rung sgar, for instance, the monastic population is distributed between two separate religious complexes: one for monks and one for nuns. The first is located in upper gSer rta bLa rung and consists of five colleges: Nyes tshogs rang grol gling, 'Dod dgu kun 'byung gling, sNang sems dbang sdud gling, Phyogs las rnam rgyal gling, and Don gnyis lhun grub gling. The lower bLa rung is occupied by the sKu gsum mkha' 'gro 'du gling nunnery with three branch nunneries: Lhan skyes chos sku'i gling, sNgags skyes long sku'i gling, and the Zhing skyes sprul sku'i gling. Most of the encampments welcome a religious population representing all traditions of Tibetan Buddhism from all regions of Tibet. Many monastics reside only for relatively short periods of time depending on their interest in obtaining a degree as *mkhan po* for monks, and *mkhan mo*, for nuns. It is common for monastics to return to their home institutions after having completed their studies successfully.

Sixth, lay Buddhist devotees and non-celibate Tantric practitioners live at the religious encampments and engage with the monastics. It is quite common for *chos sgar* and *ri khrod* to have quarters for lay people in some cases with their own congregation halls (*tshogs khang*) where they can gather to attend the teachings and receive empowerments from the *mkhan po*. This is one of the main features of religious communities of both *chos sgar*s and *ri khrod*, which

[261] Spiegel (2004: 41). For my discussion on *Ya chen sgar* and *bLa rung sgar* see below. Much has been reported on the facts related to events mentioned above, especially by media. For an overview of Chinese policy towards Tibet and religious issues in the land see in particular the Human Rights Watch Reports (1997; 2004).

in most cases house resident populations of both monastics and non-celibate followers who live together at the encampments, although usually in clearly demarcated areas based on gender.[262] A few large *sgar*s, such as bLa rung sgar for instance, have appointed areas for assembly halls specifically meant for laypeople (*dge bsnyen*).[263] Large gatherings in the main assembly hall (*tshogs khang*) usually take place once a day when teachings and empowerments are formally given by the main teacher specifically appointed to instruct lay devotees. Lay people thus live in the peripheral quarters of religious complexes and often visit the main teachers (*mkhan po*) to practice under their supervision.[264]

Seventh, due to the loose character of their organization, the *chos sgar*s and *ri khrod* are usually not formally institutionalized communities adhering to a fixed set of state regulations. The existence of such quasi-monastic religious centers is rather vulnerable as it is affected by precarious and ambiguous relationships with local authorities who are in charge of the application of the central government's policies. This being said, most of the religious encampments, and especially those which have chosen to shape their identity through an emphasis on education, have managed to enjoy some degree of autonomy usually under the tolerant supervision of local authorities. The actual internal supervisory and decisional duties of these places are carried out by high religious personalities or by prominent teachers who hold such roles in tandem with their teaching positions. The monastic population being practically autonomous and free to come and go without any formal obligation, registration, or binding enrollment procedures, most of the practical aspects of administration are thus assumed by seminary teachers (*mkhan po*) responsible for their own groups of students. Although transparent, these procedures thus usually tend to remain contained within a minimum administrative process that is common for mountain retreat centers in order to avoid any direct

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[262] While at bLa rung sgar lay devotees have their own temple/assembly hall, other *chos sgars* have different solutions for different needs. Lung sngon sgar, for instance, offers a Tantric institute (sNgags pa grwa tshang) for the formation of non-celibate religious specialists.

[263] In October 2000, I had the chance to visit the lay practitioners' area of bLa rung sgar in gSer rta. Although many monks and nuns host relatives at their own residences, lay Buddhist devotees established a major compound of modest dwellings in the southern peripheral area of the encampment complex. The temple Legs tshogs char 'bebs gling was specifically built for them where regular daily meetings were held and teachings bestowed by seminary teachers (*mkhan po*) appointed by mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs.

[264] In the specific case of bLa rung sgar, a large compound was built to host foreign students in 2004. The International Foreign Students' Study Hall (*rgyal phyi'i chos slob khang*) is located at the center of the encampment complex. Although, since the 2001 crackdown Westerners are not permitted to actually sojourn at bLa rung sgar, the local Public Security Bureau allows short visits on request. The International Foreign Center usually hosts visiting Chinese monastics and devotees.

involvement with the official regulations for administration and registration of religious activities which are compulsory for monasteries.

Eighth, usually the monastic and non-celibate practitioners who reside at the encampments are not financially nor logistically supported by the *sgar*. They are expected to have their own financial support (usually provided by their families), and provide for their own accomodation, provisions, and daily necessities. The same is valid for study material such as textbooks. Monks and nuns take care of their huts, each of them built according to his/her own financial capacity with the construction material they are able to find and purchase, often helped by other members of the community. Most of the resident population live modestly and are often supported only by their relatives and occasional donations of alms. The situation of Chinese monastics is often more dramatic. Recently, during my visits to various encampments, especially between 2004 and 2007, I have met many Chinese monastics, primarily nuns, who live for extended periods of time in Tibet studying and residing at religious encampments, especially at Ya chen sgar and bLa rung sgar. In conversations with them I have found out that a large number of Chinese nuns receive little or no financial support from their families, who in most cases do not agree with their religious choices. I have also been told that if a nun or monk does not receive any family support, their *mkhan mo* or *mkhan po* offers her or him a minimum wage of approximately 100 RMB (8 USD) per month.

From a Chinese political point of view concerned with issues of internal stability and ethnic unity, the activities of religious leaders who are in charge of religious communities both inside and outside monastic institutions, the power they have to mobilize masses of devotees and supporters, the force and impact of their religious claims and visions on the devotees, and the significant size of many of the religious encampments are all perceived as threats to government authority. This is especially true when local Chinese authorities suspect that a leading teacher is a supporter of the Dalai Lama, has a nationalistic agenda potentially opposing the Chinese government, or has contacts with the Tibetan community in exile. That this situation is perceived as a threat by the local political authorities and government cadres often results in alternating periods of toleration and suppression of religious activities at the religious encampments, threatening their very continuation. The central government's overt concern with the expansion of such religious centers and the popularity they are gaining not only among Tibetan devotees but also and more interestingly among Chinese Buddhist devotees as well was clearly demonstrated with the 2001 suppression campaigns at the Buddhist encampments of bLa rung

sgar and Ya chen sgar. These episodes resulted in the dismantling of many monastic quarters of the institutes, expulsion of thousands of both Tibetan and Chinese monks and nuns, and placements of limitations in terms of resident practitioners.[265]

One of the principal features of the rNying ma quasi-monastic communities, both religious encampments and mountain hermitages, is their leaders' employment of charismatic activities to claim authority and spiritual virtuosity. In the religious revival operating in eastern Tibet, next to the devotion, scholarship, and knowledge traditionally claimed by monastic elites, other important sources of religious authority are healing, divination, Treasure revelation, asceticism, and visionary and dream experiences, predominantly the field of non-celibate Tantric professionals. Labeled "feudal superstition" (Ch. *fengjian mixin*) by Communist leaders in their polical and ideological campaigns against religion during the Cultural Revolution, forms of "irrational" behavior and practices such as belief in spirits and supernatural feats and blind-faith in religious specialists such as diviners, healers, and weather-makers were vehemently discouraged and labelled "exploitative of the masses." In the post-Mao era however, religion and irrational religious behaviors ceased to be stigmatized but have been nevertheless objectified as hindrance to the country's human development and modern progress. One of the Chinese government's major hopes is that religion will lessen its influence on people's sense of ethnic identity especially in ethnic minority groups by inproving the quality of their socio-economic life. Nowadays, to the typical Marxist-Lenininst rhetoric of "feudalism" or "class struggle," has been added the new concerns of the government leaders about "national harmony" and "unity of the country." In a 2005 issue of *Tibet United Front* a government sponsored semestral publication we read that in the process of adapting ethnic minority religion to the new society

> [...] it is necessary to fight large scale nationalisms and small scale nationalisms, encourage all public figures to embrace mutual understanding and fair competition, upholding and strengthening great harmony among ethnic groups and safeguarding the unity of the country.[266]

Despite the historical marginality that these Tibetan contemplation-oriented forms of religious centers acquired in the face of scholasticism-oriented and institutionalized religious authority represented by monastic institutions, charismatic leadership is among the most

[265] For a report of the demolition campaign against gSer rta bLa rung sgar see TCHRD (2001).
[266] The article titled "Xinshehui jiceng yu minzu zongjiao gongzuo" (New social stratum and the work of ethnic religions) was authored by the United Front Committe of Ruthog County in Nga' ris (Ali rishi weitongxianbu) on *Xizang tongyi zhanxian* (Tibet United Front), 2005, 2, n. 42, pp. 26-27.

successful religious cohesive forces active within Buddhism in Tibet today.[267] Tibetan experts and scholars of the past, often biased by sectarian affiliation, have tended to negate the role of arcane systems of religious transmission such as the one advanced by exponents of the treasure tradition with a certain dose of polemical skepticism.[268] Today Chinese government authorities deal harshly with religious leaders who are objects of veneration in Tibet, as well as in other regions of the country. Such an attitude is backed by China in order to illustrate China's overall dominance on all forms of religious expression and practice.[269]

In pre-modern Tibet, as well as nowadays, both monastic and non-monastic forms of religious institutions coexisted harmoniously. Although the monastic community was by and large considered to be the formal religious authority, on a more local level, commoners often requested the services of non-celibate Tantric specialists (*sngags pa*). They were highly appreciated by villagers for their divinatory and geomantic skills and their expertise in weather-making. In his study of Tibetan religious world, Samuel contrasted the monastic world with that of the non-monastic forms of Buddhist practice.[270] Dreyfus, instead, has recently argued that the relationship between monasticism and lay practice was one of reciprocal influence.[271] In the border areas of Khams and A mdo where historically the traditional religious and political presence and influence of the dGe lugs pa-led central government of Tibet often had little power, the dichotomy between rational, institutional authority on the one hand and charismatically-achieved leadership, on the other, seemed vague if not absent altogether.

This chapter illustrates the formation of *sgar*-like compounds, or religious encampments, and attempts to show the current shift of traditional prestige-making factors in religious leadership in present-day Khams from the formal religious monastic institutions to non-monastic ones. The concept of *chos sgar* in Tibet conveys the idea of a specific non-conventional and above all flexible and dynamic camp-like entity. This mobility results from the absence of

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[267] The attention on meditation and scholasticism in Tibetan religious traditions varies significantly according to different Buddhist schools. As Dreyfus comments, in Tibet "meditation has never been the concern of more than a minority. Some may believe that this lack of interest reflects degeneration from some purer form of the tradition, but they are wrong. There is in fact no obligation for a Buddhist monk to practice meditation." Dreyfus (2003: 169). The role of meditation is more emphasized in small hermitages, mountain retreat centers, and religious encampments where contemplative experience is a major focus of the Buddhist practice as opposed to scriptural erudition as a principal achievement in the monastic environment.

[268] As for one of these polemical debates concerning scriptural authority, apocryphal texts, and Buddhist canonicity in Tibet see Kapstein (1989: 217-244).

[269] PRC government applies control over all forms of religious practice. See the section "Freedom of Belief in China" in *Dangerous Meditation: China's Campaign Against Falungong* at http:// www.hrw.org/reports/2002/china.

[270] Samuel (1993).

[271] Dreyfus (2003).

specific systems of enrollment and the continuous inflow and outflow of religious community members who are not bound to the institution but who are only temporarily residing in it in order to complete specific religious training, receive particular instructions, and study under a local teacher. The role of *sgar* in pre-modern Tibet is still quite unexplored. Only recently scholars have attempted to describe the interface between *sgar* residents and monastic populations and the dynamics between spiritual leaders and their followers at the *chos sgars*.[272]

The late mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1934-2003) and Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan (more popularly known as mKhan po A chos), are known for their revelations and are the leaders of two of the most popular and largest religious encampments in Sichuan.[273] Other well-known current Buddhist teachers and Treasure revealers are Padma gtum po (also known as O rgyan sku gsum gling pa), bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, gTer ston lHa rgyal, Sangs shis rin po che (gTer chen O rgyan kun skyong gling pa), Khang sar bstan pa'i dbang phyug, mThu ldan rdo rje, Rig 'dzin nyi ma, rNam sprul 'Jigs med phung tshogs, and the mKha' 'gro late Tāre lha mo.[274] One of the reasons for the great popularity of these Buddhist teachers among eastern Tibetans can be partially explained by the quality of their ability to combine traditional, rational institutional authority, some of them being monks living a monastic lifestyle and maintenaning *vinaya* vows, with spontaneous manifestations of charismatic powers such as visionary activities and *gter ma* revelation.[275] Although few, there are cases of Treasure revealers who are monks, as in the case of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan. However, most of today's Treasure revealers are non-celibate (and in the case of Nam sprul 'Jigs

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[272] Sarah Jacoby, for instance, in her study of Se ra mkha' 'gro's auto/biographical writings has pointed out interesting dynamics between *sgar* and monasteries within two such communities in early twentieth century mGo log (2007).

[273] Significant news coverage has appeared since the crackdowns of religious establishments of bLa rung sgar encampment in gSer rta and Ya chen sgar near dKar mdzes by Chinese authorities. The severe actions by Chinese government at these religious encampments, expulsion of nuns and monks, destruction of residential homes, and restrictions on administration, is paramount to the understanding of the CCP's position on religious activities and the difficulty in clarifying the boundaries of what the CCP regards as acceptable in their practice. For a general overview of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs' religious activity see Germano (1998). For more on the events briefly mentioned above see the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, TCHRD (2001). More information is available at the websites of International Campaign for Tibet at http://www.savetibet.org, and Tibet Information Network at http://www.tibetinfo.net. See below for my own discussion on this topic.

[274] mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs passed away on January 4$^{th}$, 2003. mKha' 'gro rin po che Tāre bde chen rgyal mo, also simply known as Tāre lha mo (1938-2002), was the daughter of a well-known Treasure discoverer from Khams, gTer chen O rgyan 'phrin las gling pa and herself a Treasure revealer as she is believed to have discovered a number of material and mind Treasures. Padma 'od gsal mtha' yas (1997: 132-133).

[275] mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, for instance, was devoted to the emphasis of the *Vinaya* discipline and the system of vows for monastics and was rather critical of Tantric non-monastic adepts. Germano (1998: 70) and Terrone (2006).

med phun tshogs and mKha' 'gro Tāre lha mo they were partners) who live a householder life in which they perform religious and ritual duties in a non-monastic environment. The nature of Treasure revealers, the modalities through which their revelation skills manifest, and the loyalties they receive are usually modeled on forms of expression of renunciation and yoga-based esoteric discipline predominantly practiced within a non-celibate milieu. Whatever their ordination commitments, both monastic and non-monastic groups of religious specialists are dedicated to the diffusion of Buddhism according to their own predominant style and perform a specific social role (some are also traditional physicians as in the case of mThu ldan rdo rje from 'Jig 'dril). However, despite the fact that the fame of some contemporary Treasure revealers has been internationalized (if not globalized), largely to an academic and/or Buddhist community abroad, my study of the popularity of *gter ston* in today's Tibet reveals that it is largely at the local and/or regional level that most Treasure revealers seem to best express their charismatic personalities.

All the Treasure revealers I have met and interviewed in Tibet claim to have discovered sacred objects or earth Treasures (*sa gter*), but many have also revealed scriptures in the form of mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*), which often form entire cycles of teachings. Their fame, their traditional way of teaching, their revelatory skills, and the peculiarity of their institutions have thus attracted a significant number of monastics who are inspired by their visions, the prophetic nature of their messages, and the soteriological content of their Treasure revelations. Drawn by a desire to learn from experienced and authentic masters, many monks and nuns, both Tibetan and Chinese, leave their home monasteries and move to these large religious encampments, which have thus grown remarkably in population size and the quality of the teachings.[276] In religious encampments, monastics as well as lay practitioners receive empowerments, teachings, and instructions on various aspects of Buddhist exoteric and esoteric practices.

As already briefly mentioned above, the phenomenon of *sgar* is not new to the Tibetan religious world as religious encampments have been active since the fourteenth century in Tibet.

[276] Official figures regarding the resident or visiting population of the major *sgar* actually active in Khams are difficult to obtain since no official and formal census has been carried out in these religious encampments to my knowledge. At the time of my fieldwork during my first visit of bLa rung sgar in October 2000, I was told by a monk accompanying me that the number of residents was around 10,000 individuals including both nuns and monks, and also lay practitioners. On the contrary Ya chen sgar (alzo called A chos sgar or A khyug sgar), the encampment led by Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, was less populated than bLa rung sgar. In conversations with resident monastics during my visit to both Yachen sgar and bLa rung sgar in September and October 2000, I was told that the population of the two settlements was estimated at around 3,000 individuals with peaks of 5,000 to 8,000 individuals during public empowerments and teachings.

However, what has enabled the re-creation of today's religious encampments is the ability to adapt to the contemporary social context and the policy applied by the central government concerning religious activities. Today's religious encampments are indeed large settlements grown around religious leaders and host large populations of devotees coming from Tibetan areas, as well as from many other regions of China.[277] What religious encampments and mountain hermitages seem to offer to monastics today is a modern approach to traditional religious education focused on both textual and meditative competence. As we will see in more detail below, in most *chos sgars* the emphasis is on classic scholastic practices that rely on philosophico-religious curricula and specific meditative systems such as the Great Perfection. In addition, the presence of charismatic leaders known for meditative expertise, scholastic knowledge, and visionary expertise functions as a pole of attraction for the devotees who look at these figures as source of inspiration, exemplary lifestyle, and knowledge holders. Tibetan Buddhist monasteries traditionally intended to provide an ideal environment for monastics to practice a renunciant way of life following the precepts of *vinaya* monastic discipline (*'dul ba*). The life in monasteries was generally communal, with its daily religious services such as assembly gatherings for recitations and rituals, classes, memorization of texts, and practice of debate. Income-producing activities were also an important aspect within monasteries especially for common monks not predominantly involved in higher studies.[278] Traditional Buddhist instruction and education according to orthodox and institutionalized curricula provided scholar monks a variety of teachings aimed at the development of high degree of religious expertise. My own perception of the contemporary situation of monastic education in Tibet is that the courses offered in monasteries have been heavily degraded and substantially diluted. Since monasteries, as formal religious institutions are under the strict control and supervision of local authorities of the Religious Affairs Bureau, the quality and prestige of today's curricula differ enormously from that of the traditional religious monastic education once accessible in pre-modern Tibet.

On the contrary, administration and economic well-being are not dealt with at religious encampments and mountain hermitages due not only to the decentralized structure and often loose organization of these centers, but also to the lifestyle that the monastics embrace. The

[277] Chinese students, mainly nuns and monks come from various regions. A flier distributed at bLa rung sgar mentions various regions of the PRC such as Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai, Xizang, Yunnan, Nei menggu (Inner Mongolia), Heilongjiang, Henang, Hebei, Shanxi, Jiangxi, Fujian, Jieling, and even Xinjiang as major places of origin of most of the Chinese students.
[278] This aspect of monastic life indeed generated major issues of morality and virtue-related responsibilities. See Dreyfus (2003) and Goldstein (1998: 22).

absence of an official administrative system which regulates the management of the social space, an education usually based on short-term curricula, and unsubsidized housing system for monastics and lay people, all created complications for the local branches of CCP, such as Democratic Management Committees and political education teams. Uninvolved in income-producing services for the visiting devotees and administrative matters, the monastics living at the *chos sgar* and *ri khrod* adhere to an eremitic lifestyle focused on study, practice, and contemplation.

The leaders of the *chos sgar* are often charismatic figures, Tantric practitioners interested in individual practice mainly belonging to the rNying ma school and with a *rDzogs chen* contemplation background. Although religious encampments such as Ya chen sgar, bLa rung sgar, and Lung sngon sgar, like many other hermitages, offer education and instruction for predominantly contemplation-based practices focusing on *rDzogs chen*, the curriculum for monks and nuns includes a variety of courses offered in both classical Buddhist and, in some cases, even modern studies. At bLa rung sgar teachers emphasize some of the classical monastic exoteric (*mtshan nyid*) i.e. non-Tantric, studies that are offered following the general scholastic approach typical of hermeneutical curriculum in *dbu ma* (*mādhyamaka*, middle way philosophy), *tshad ma* (*pramāṇa*, logic, epistemology, and philosophy of language), *pha rol tu phyin pa* literature (*prajñāpāramitā*, the Perfection of Wisdom), *chos mngon pa* (*Abhidharma*, Buddhist metaphysics), and *'dul ba* (*vinaya*, Monastic discipline). The pedagogical exercise of debating (*rtsod pa*) is also actively encouraged. In addition to these disciplines, courses of esoteric education (*sngags*) are presented including the classic Tantric outer triad (*spyi rgyud*) of *kriyāyoga*, *caryāyoga*, *yogatantra*, and the specific rNying ma tantric inner division (*nang rgyud*) of *mahāyoga*, *anuyoga*, and *atiyoga*, with major emphasis on *rdzogs chen*. Moreover, general courses are offered in composition (*rtsom pa*) and in some of the five minor and major branches of Buddhist sciences (*rig gnas chung ba lnga dang rig gnas che ba lnga*) including *sgra rig pa* (grammar), *snyan ngag* (poetry), *bzo rig pa* (arts and crafts), *gtan tshigs rig pa* (logic and epistemology), *nang don rig pa* (philosophy), and fundamentals of *gso ba rig pa* (medicine).[279]

However, unlike bLa rung sgar where scholastic and meditation education tend to be equally emphasized, other major rNying ma encampments have their own curricula more

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[279] In discussing the curriculum of classical Buddhist education and knowledge I follow Dreyfus (2003: 98-106) and Dudjom Rinpoche (1991: 97-109).

focused on Tantric studies and meditation practice rather than on Buddhist scholasticism. These include sNyan lung sgar in the sNyan lung region of gSer rta in dKar mdzes led by sNam sprul ’Jigs med phun tshogs, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan’s Ya chen sgar (also called A chos sgar) in dPal yul county (Ch. Baiyu), and the late O rgyan sKu gsum gling pa’s Lung sngon sgar (also known as Thub bstan chos skor gling) in dGa’ bde, A mdo mGo log.[280] At Lung sngon sgar, O rgyan sku gsum gling pa also created a college for Tantric studies (sNgags pa grwa tshang) for non-celibate practitioners including children. In most of the current rNying ma encampments instruction mainly follows the traditional transmission from teacher to disciple, and most of the didactic material related to meditation practice is drawn from the *snying thig* (Seminal Heart) cycle of practices. Although material from Treasure teachings (*gter chos*) revealed by leaders is also offered in the curriculum for monastics in their entourage, the *snying thig* tradition has been particularly re-emphasized by *gter* movements in Tibet in the past decades, and new publications of those scriptures are now available.[281]

## *New Trends in Tibetan Buddhism: A New Chinese Journey to the West?*

A relatively recent phenomenon that reflects the extension of Buddhist activities and the popularity that Tibetan Buddhism is enjoying outside Tibet is the increasing presence of Chinese devotees in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and religious encampments. Both monastic and lay Chinese Buddhist devotees are more and more visible in Tibetan religious centers where they spend long periods of time studying and practicing Vajrayāna Buddhism. Often defying local authorities’ restrictions and discontent at large groups of Chinese staying at *sgars*, hermitages, and monasteries, Chinese disciples and even representative delegations from all regions of China regulalry visit Buddhist centers in Tibet. As is the case for the Tibetan monastic population in religious encampments and hermitages, figures are not available at the time of this writing, but according to my observations some encampments such bLa rung sgar, sNyan lung sgar, Lung sngon sgar, Ya chen sgar were home to a few hundred Chinese students between 1999 and 2005. However, in 2001 bLa rung sgar alone sheltered a population of nearly 1,000 non-Tibetan

[280] Not all Treasure revealers have developed their hermitages to the extent of those described herein. However, all the encampments mentioned in this volume are lead by Treasure revealers. My comments refer only to those encampments visited during my fieldwork visits between 1999 and 2006.

[281] Germano (1998) has provided some valuable insights on the revival of *snying thig* among contemplation movements of today’s Tibet. See previous chapter for my discussion on *snying thig* and *rdzogs chen*.

Chinese speaking students coming not only from China itself, but also from other southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia.

Until 2001, bLa rung sgar and to different degrees other religious encampments provided facilities for Chinese devotees with no Tibetan language knowledge such as translated texts and simultaneous oral translation in Chinese of the teachings provided. Today a number of religious encampments have their own printing house, and they provide Chinese language publications of selected instruction and practice material, text books, and biographies.[282] Many *sgars* offer classes of colloquial and literary Tibetan for Chinese visitors, and are equipped with rooms or areas designated for hosting Chinese monastics and lay practitioners at times when Chinese simultaneous translation is needed during public teachings.[283]

The current phenomenon of Chinese practitioners moving to Tibetan ethnic areas to study and practice Tibetan Buddhism can be viewed within a general revival of religious and spiritual quest among the Chinese in the PRC, which in the words of journalist Gordon Chang is "at present the world's biggest growth area for religion."[284] Beginning in the early 1980s, such a phenomenon is a result of the changes within the society in the reform era. In the PRC where the growing pace of the new market economy, the higher level of individual autonomy, physical mobility, and personal goals are now in the hands of the individual, the central government's atheistic ideological hegemony fails to provide its people with a compansatory surge in life aspiration and personal spiritual growth. In the year 2000, there were more than 200 million Chinese religious believers in China and of those more than a half were Buddhists. In China there are 85,000 authorized places of religious practice including 16,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries.[285]

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[282] The increasing demand for Chinese language material from Chinese disciples in *gSer rta bla rung sgar* resulted in the creation of a printing house for Chinese language textbooks, speeches by mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, his biography, and Tibetan textbooks. In the year 2000, a short biography in Chinese of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs was published and distributed at bLa rung sgar among Chinese-reading disciples called *Shengzhe fawang Jinmei pengcuo zunzhezhuan* (A Biography of the Holy Dharma king 'Jigs med phun tshogs). In addition, two among the most common textbooks for Tibetan language classes offered at bLa rung sgar were the *Dag yig slob deb* (Ganzi: Ganzizhou minzu ganbu xuexiao, 1989) and the *Shumian zangyu changyong guanglian ciyu yongfa juyao* (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshi, 1993).

[283] This information reflects the state of bLa rung sgar prior to 2001as personally witnessed during a visit of the site and to mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs at his residence. During the summer of 2001, as also reported by many Western monitoring agencies and media, Chinese authorities entered the encampment and destroyed thousands of the residences of the monastic population and expelled thousands of students, including all the Chinese population. Despite restrictions Han Chinese devotees are living again at bLa rung sgar. See Terrone (2008).

[284] Chang (2002: 23).

[285] Kindopp (2004: 1). In addition to the phenomenon of Chinese Buddhist devotees joining religious encampments, I have also witnessed the presence of individual and small groups of Chinese devotees from Taiwan and Hong Kong

The success and the increasing popularity of religious centers such as the *chos sgar* among Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist practitioners and devotees in eastern regions of Tibet is largely the result of the quality of the curricula they offer in terms of education on the one hand, and the revival of a variety of religious rituals and contemplation practices they provide on the other. An additional factor which contributes to the increasing popularity of the non-monastic centers is the outreach of the communication network that many teachers have developed in the last few years. Teachers such as mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, but also Padma gtum po, and Nam sprul 'Jigs med phun tshogs have often traveled to Chinese regions of the PRC predominantly for pilgrimage purposes, performing public rituals, fund raising, wintering in warmer places, and giving teachings and blessing thus gathering during these occasions large followings of admirers and devotees. mKhan po 'Jigs me phun tshogs' pilgrimage at Wutai Shan in 1987 was apparently performed with the clear evangelical idea of disseminating the Buddhist teachings in China. mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs was there for one hundred days accompanied by an entourage from bLa rung sgar of nearly one thousand people. At Mount Wutai (Ch. Wutai Shan), he gave teachings and revealed Treasures attracting crowds of Chinese visitors.[286]

## *Concluding Remarks*

Is the emergence of encampments and hermitages associated with *gter stons* a successful means for preserving of Buddhist culture in contemporary Tibet under Chinese rule? Are religious encampments and mountain hermitages, as foci of traditional education and religious training, a possible answer to the weakening of monastic centers caused by the Chinese government's pressure on traditional religious practice? And can the increased visibility of Treasure revealers

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visiting their teacher's place on a short term basis as donors and financial supporters of construction or re-construction projects. As a proof of the increasing popularity that these centers are gaining also outside the PRC it maybe worth noting here that on July 2001 even the popular blockbuster Chinese Hollywood actor Li Liangjie, alias Jet Li visited bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje at his residence after having heard of him at the Mer chen monastery in Shar mda', Nang chen, while traveling in the area. Li Lianjie recently embraced Tibetan Buddhism and is a disciple of lHo Kun bzang chos mchog rdo rje rin po che (b. 1942), head of the dPal me monastery in Shar mda'. He has also launched the Palme Gonpa Monastery Reconstruction Project for the restoration and reconstruction of religious buildings and statues distroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

[286] See Germano (1998) for an account of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs' pilgrimage journey to Wutai shan in Shanxi, PRC in 1987. See also an account of this visit by mKhan po bSod dar rgyas in Sodarjey (1990: 106-108).

in present-day regions of Khams be considered a sign of their growing authority as leading institutions in the reappropriation of religious practices?

This chapter addressed these questions, which are ultimately linked to issues of cultural, political and social changes taking place in today's Tibetan regions of the PRC. I have argued that the current intensification of the role of religious encampments in Tibet, as the most important centers of traditional education, religious rituals, and collective identity, can be understood as a means of adapting to the new socio-political order deployed by Tibetans religious leaders and religious practitioners in the face of Chinese pressure and continued control over religious activities in monasteries. It is my sense that policies of religious control, patriotic education campaigns, and the coercive diffusion of socialist culture over the past decades have been particularly intense in the monasteries, which has caused caused an inevitable weakening of their traditional power and authority. These events have also caused the flight abroad of many high religious personalities and the migration of thousands of both lay people and monastics to pursue a secular and religious education elsewhere.

In such a context we may consider the current popularization of religious encampments and hermitages and the key role played by their charismatic leaders to be an alternative means to regain a degree of control over religious practice and religious authority. The renewed role of the Treasure revealers' religious encampments and their on-going visionary activities enrich the holiness of their sites and the legitimacy of their leadership. This phenomenon can be seen as an attempt to re-define the role of the religious elites and the masses in their attempts to regain control over Tibetan cultural and religious life. Charismatic leaders claiming the visionary gift of Treasure revelation are one of the major forces behind such a phenomenon. Their strength originates from both the Treasures they reveal and the new wave of Chinese Buddhist devotees who go to Tibet to study and practice with them.

# Chapter Three: Treasure Revealers in Contemporary Eastern Tibet



In the previous chapters we explored how Tibetans and Tibetan literature portray the Treasure tradition and examined the socio-political background of religion in today's eastern Tibet. This chapter explores the lives and activities of some Treasure revealers who are active in Tibet now and looks at the central aspects of their Treasure revelations, their communities, and their responses to the impact of modernization. Perhaps one of the most characteristic and, at times, controversial aspects of Treasure revealers is their lifestyle. Occasionally, non-celibate Treasure revealers can be susceptible to criticism by other religious leaders for their apparently licentious behavior. The question of authenticity and the role of consorts in the practices associated with Treasure revelation is still debated today. Another intriguing aspect is the way Treasure revealers are becoming more present in their devotees' lives promoting themselves as models for their followers.

Who are today's Treasure revealers in Tibet? Where and how do they live? What kind of communities do they generate around them? These are some of the general questions we will examine while exploring the lives of Treasure revealers. In studying the phenomenon of Treasure revelation in eastern Tibet with a number of active visionaries, I have been exposed to many individual activities, practices, and daily routines. Such an opportunity has inspired insights into the following questions: How do a Treasure revealer and his consort act together to reveal Treasures? How do Treasure revealers support themselves? Who can actually be considered an authentic Treasure revealer? What are the criteria to determine the validity of Treasure revelations? How do Treasure revealers offer themselves as models to their community? How are today's Treasure revealers responding to the flourishing communication and information technology?

To answer these questions this chapter will first provide an overview of the phenomenon of Treasure revelation by examining various Treasure revealers currently active in eastern Tibet and their communities. The main body of the chapter draws predominantly on the life and activities of bKra shis rgyal mtshan (b. 1957) one of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's closest disciples and a Treasure revealer. bKra shis rgyal mtshan currently lives in Shar mda' in Nang chen (Qinghai Province) with his partner mKha' 'gro dPal chen lha mo, herself a Tantric practitioner,

their children, and a small group of relatives and monastics. The life of bKra shis rgyal mtshan, a non-celibate Tantric professional, offers a valuable glimpse into the world of Treasure revelation from the point of view of a couple, highlighting the role of consorts in the process of revelation. In the section "The Dagger of Sublime Wisdom" I illustrate how a Treasure revealer and his consort act together to reveal Treasures and what kind of services they offer to their followers. In doing so I demonstrate that as a religious couple they also combine a varying series of mystical skills to provide spiritual assistance to and receive material support from the community.

We will then discuss the ongoing debate concerning consorts, noncelibacy, and the authenticity of Treasure revealers. In the context of Treasure revelation, consort practices are conducive to realization and, therefore, intrinsic to the visionary activity itself. To investigate such a sensitive issue, I consider both the opinion of bKra shis rgyal mtshan and that of an influential monastic leader, the late mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs. While the former believes that one or multiple prophesied consorts can enhance the Treasure revealer's success in visionary revelation, the latter questioned such a tradition and introduced ethical issues in the recognition of authentic Treasure revealers.

However, Treasure revealers do not influence their devotees and foster faith in their disciplines by traditional means only. Thanks to modernization and the introduction of new technologies, the economy of Treasure revelation and the traditional exchange visionaries establish with the people who support them are offering innovative methods such as the Internet to promote and gain support for their activities, publicize predicaments and pilgrimage journeys, disseminate Buddhist doctrines and instructions, and above all create virtual communities. The last two sections of this chapter analyze the impact of modernization and information technology on the practice of Tibetan Buddhism and examine the ways in which some Treasure revealers have responded to such new expertise. In eastern Tibet, an increasing number of Buddhist teachers are employing the Internet. Several web sites devoted to the dissemination of Treasure revealers' biographies, activities, and teachings have been started in recent years. This modern tool offers a new opportunity to communicate directly with their devotees, disseminate their religious ideas, and gain support for their projects. Since their websites are predominantly in Chinese some Treasure revealers seem to use this opportunity especially to project themselves as models to their Chinese Buddhist followers. The case study of O rgyan sKu gsum gling pa will give us the opportunity to explore this phenomenon in greater detail.

### *Who are Today's Tibetan Treasure Revealers?*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, theologically Treasure revelation is explained in traditional literature as an inherited skill, something attained as a part of the reincarnation status of the Treasure revealer. Pragmatically speaking though, Treasure revelation involves a high level of experiential background gained through a commitment to austerity and discipline in the performance of yogic exercises. Most of the Treasure revealers in today's eastern Tibet fall under the category of *sngags pa*, or non-celibate Tantric specialists, whose lives are devoted to the practice and performance of rituals and contemplation techniques. In Tibet, as in most of the Tibetan cultures along the Himalayas, this class of religious professionals predominantly represents the rNying ma order. While many people in Tibet are *sngags pa* by claiming birth from hereditary lineages (*gdung brgyud*), others become non-celibate Tantric professionals after studying under a specialized teacher.[287] In either case a *sngags pa* is both a Tantric adept aiming at enlightenment through the performance of esoteric rituals and contemplative and yogic techniques and also the catalyst for a series of major public rituals meant to benefit the community and lay population.

But why and how do people become Treasure revealers today? There are a whole set of circumstances and a certain predisposition that lead the individual to reveal Treasures. In Tibet this is explained according to Buddhist ideology and principally interpreted as the ripening of "interdependent circumstances" (*rten 'brel*). Some contemporary Treasure revealers claim birth from other Treasure revealers. One example is Tāre lha mo (1938-2002) who was the daughter of the famous A pang gter chen dPa' bo chos dbyings rdo rje, also known as 'Phrin las gling pa (1895-1945).[288] However, most Treasure revealers do not inherit their title but rather are recognized and declared as such by other influential religious personalities. In other words, one of the criteria for the recognition of a Treasure revealer is the authority of another leading Buddhist personality. In most cases, however, the recognition of a Treasure revealer is a combination of factors and prerequisites often including the presence of a high degree of visionary activity and prophetic dreams in combination with the support of authoritative religious personalities. This is particularly evident in the case of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje who, when asked about the way he realized he was a Treasure revealer, said:

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[287] Samuel (1993: 278-81); Childs (2004: 29-33).
[288] Padma 'od gsal mtha' yas (1997: 133).

> When I was about six or seven years old, in my mind I knew that I was to perform Treasure activities (*gter gyi bya ba*). Later, when I was older, as I was doing prostrations while on route to Lhasa, the *ḍakīṇi* with whom I had a karmic connection (*las bskos kyi mkha 'gro*) told me that we two had Treasure deeds to perform. Kun bzang 'gro 'dul empowered me as a Treasure revealer. In accordance with his teaching that in the future many Treasures would necessarily descend [upon me], he also knew that there would be a total of eight volumes [of Treasure scriptures], [of which at that time] approximately one volume of mind Treasures, and also earth Treasures. After that, I revealed a Treasure right in the presence of the King of Rwa sgreng, Bu bla mTshan nyid bsod bstan Rinpoche. The master told me "You are a Treasure revealer!" and empowered me as such. Then, even the well-known great Treasure revealer Nyag bla Byang chub rdo rje said to me that I was a Treasure revealer. He entrusted me with the retrieval of a Turquoise Treasure (*g.yu gter*) and I went to retrieve it. This is common knowledge also thanks to many masters' prophecies, including that of the sixteenth Karmapa. Other current well-known masters told me that I was a Treasure revealer and wrote certificates for me. I have perfect letters [declaring] that I am a Treasure revealer by the Sa skya [master] Klu lding mkhan chen, mKhan po A chos, and mChog [gyur] gling [pa].[289]

As the passage above illustrates, for Treasure revealers, the practice of Treasure revelations and their transmission are parts of an ideology, a holistic ordering of a world formed of interconnected events. At the center of this ideology is the self-asserting identity of the Treasure revealer (visions, dreams, revelations) who claims to be, among other things, a blessed being endowed with charisma and a bearer of special authority, a fortunate human being (*skal ldan bu*). Immediately corroborating this is the supporting view of the religious world represented by the Buddhist community (i.e., a high Buddhist personality's visions, dreams, and recognition of the would-be Treasure revealer). In a sociological and socio-religious discourse, the role of these two figures—the Treasure revealer and the Buddhist authority recognizing him/her—is relevant in order to understand how persons manipulate and produce meaning in their cultural environment. It is through interaction with others, for instance, that people construct their biographies, and it is by observing what they are and what they are not that they shape their own identity in a contextualized social setting. As we shall explore in detail in the next chapter, a central aspect of culture is the collective memory activated and nourished in biographies that simultaneously emerge from and create a shared sense of history.[290] Tibetan Treasure revealers act according to a specific set of religiously recognized and socially accepted patterns of actions. Their revelation and visionary activities reflect a centuries-old scheme of cultural production that

[289] bDe chen'od gsal rdo rje's oral and written communication. rDza mer chen nunnery. Shar mda', Nang chen, Qinghai. August 21, 2001.

[290] For a discussion of collective and personal histories in Khams see McGranahan (2001).

finds cyclic momentum in times of spiritual need and contributes to manifestations of religious identity.

The occurrence of the recent religious revival in Tibetan areas of the PRC is not contained within communities of national minorities only, but it is occurring among various other ethnic and Han Chinese people as well.[291] The resurgence of religious practices has favored some religions more than others, and has involved people giving new meaning to religions and their practices. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and new religious movements, such as *Falun gong* and local folk and popular religious cults all experienced new developments in popularity in the aftermath of the economic and social modernization campaign launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1979. Despite the Chinese government's control over the development of religious practices, religious revival in the PRC is a growing reality.[292]

Local religious movements within ethnic nationalities in the PRC have had a dramatic political impact, for the renewal of culture and religion often takes the form of the re-affirmation of local values. With the religious control prior to and in many cases after the 1980s in the PRC and the consequent patriotic education campaigns aimed at winning loyalties, enhancing Chinese cultural values, destabilizing the power of religious institutions, and diluting some elements of Tibetan traditional culture, much of the long-standing sources of identity and systems of authority were disrupted. Within the new processes of cultural, economic, and political modernization in the PRC in the last two decades, Tibetans' need for expression and affirmation of their cultural and religious identity has inspired the religious resurgence in eastern areas of Tibet.

While China's government presence in ethnic minorities' areas attempts to create a national unifying culture enforcing control over and supervising the lawful performance of cultural and religious activities, ethnic minorities constantly struggle to give voice to their own self-expression and sense of identity as a way of safeguarding their cultures.[293] This often encourages the recognition of the need for a renewed authority to support a rejuvenated sense of meaning and purpose in the religious community. In such a socio-historical landscape religious

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[291] Several studies have appeared in the last decade focused on the the resurgence of spiritual interests and religious traditions in the PRC including local cults, daoist practices, Buddhism, and *qi gong* exercises. See for instance the studies by Chau (2006), Davis (2005), Kindopp and Hamrin (2004), Chen (2003), Overmyer (2003), Hunter and Chan (1996), and Dean (1993), among others.

[292] See, for instance, Makley (2007), Davis (2005), and Barend J. ter Haar's "Religious culture in 20th century China" at http://website.leidenuniv.nl/~haarbjter/chinPRCbib.html.

[293] Davis (2005: 6-7).

traditions such as Treasure revealers bridge the gap between the legacy of the Tibetan past and the need for religious authority within a framework of social and cultural changes. Therefore, inspired visionaries use Treasure revelation as a means to foster faith in the continuation of Buddhism and to restore a sentiment of collective identity. As a response to experiences of chaos and loss of identity generated by new dramatic historical and political circumstances, Treasure revealers reconnect the land of Tibet and its people to the legacy of their past. It is my sense that the rejuvenation of Treasure revelation, the restoration of the role of Treasure revealers, and the emergence of Buddhist gatherings associated with them respond to Tibetans' desire for identity and reconnection with the values and social order of the past. Religious revival in Tibetan ethnic and cultural areas of the PRC today is not a rejection of modernity, as forms of fundamentalist resurgence may suggest in other parts of Asia. It may be seen, instead, as an attempt to reaffirm a Tibetan cultural and religious identity often in conflict with a nation-state ideology and loyal to a sense of ethnic order.

One of the many phenomena that has transformed and increased the dissemination of religious symbols is the use of new technology. Nowadays a large number of portraits, photos, and posters of Buddhist teachers, of the material Treasures they retrieve, and pictures of their religious encampments can be seen on display in numerous restaurants and private houses and can be easily purchased in many places.[294] Pictures of Buddhist teachers and Treasure revealers can be found inserted into framed photo-collages hanging on the wall of many private households. This is especially the case for three of the most popular Treasure revealers in eastern Tibet, the late mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, and O rgyan sKu gsum gling pa. These Buddhist teachers have gained the devotion of many clerical and lay practitioners. Devoted pilgrims converge in their encampments when public teachings are offered and return home with bagfuls of pictures, amulets, blessing cords of talismanic value, and audio-cassettes, CDs, and DVDs of the teachings they have received. Many attendees are older lay Buddhist devotees who choose to embrace an ascetic lifestyle and stay at the religious site for long periods of time to practice, attend religious activities, and live as lay renouncers.

What do Treasure revealers mean to Tibetan people? According to my personal experience, for the common uneducated person the distinction between a monastery abbot, a

[294] It is not uncommon to see pilgrims selling pictures or copies of pictures of Buddhist teachers at outdoor stands in Lhasa Bar 'khor area or to individual passersby. Concerning the recent employment of visual and audio items in the diffusion of information about contemporary charismatic teachers, see my discussion below.

village *bla ma*, a Tantric *sngags pa*, or a Treasure revealer is hardly an important matter.[295] A common perception is that all these are religious professionals, in their eyes highly educated, learned, and wise religious figures whom they can ask for advice, teachings, blessings, the performance of household and divination rites, talismans and blessed pills, protective cords, names for newborn children, the performance of astrological and geomantic calculations, and spiritual protection. Within the monastic community, however, opinions about Treasure revealers represent two different fronts. While for many members of the monastic community Treasure revealers are individuals with a very specific role in the Buddhist world often with complex personalities but with respectable spiritual experience, for others, as we will see specifically in the pages below, the authenticity of many non-celibate Treasure revealers is often questionable.

Generally speaking, Treasure revealers and non-celibate Tantric professionals alike draw their charismatic power from years of religious practice and zealous contemplative retreat (*mtshams*) spent living in seclusion in mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*). Additionally, because of their incarnated lama status (*sprul sku*), Treasure revealers are also believed to be recipients of good values, sound judgment, and high spiritual qualities. Theologically, since they are supposed to be special messengers (*pho nya*) of Padmasambhava, Treasure revealers claim to draw spiritual and virtuous qualities from the blessings received during the dynastic and imperial past of Tibet from Padmasambhava.[296] The Treasure revealer's persona is thus imbued with a divine, supernatural air.

Treasure revealers including bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, bKra shis rgyal mtshan, Nam sprul 'Jigs med phun tshogs, and others continue to retrieve and collect multiple material and spiritual Treasure items, and they have inspired communities of practitioners and devotees who support their activities. But what do Tibetan devotees believe when confronted with the quantity or even the quality of a Treasure revealer's retrieved Treasures? My sense is that one of the goals of Treasure revelation is that of fostering faith in the Buddhist religion in general and in the ideology of the rNying ma tradition in particular. Treasure revealers and their devotees seem to view the revelation of Treasure objects and scriptures as blessings (*byin rlabs*) that provide encouragement from the past, inspire a positive attitude and optimism in the face of socio-historical changes, and support expectations

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[295] Here I strictly refer to the people, mainly Tibetans, with whom I have worked, lived, and interacted during my fieldwork trips in Khams.
[296] Gyatso (1998: 152).

of salvation from dramatic events. The opportunity to receive the blessing directly from the presence of a religious sacred object is appealing to many Tibetans. This is especially true for the material retrieval of religious artifacts extracted from the soil (*sa gter*) or any other physical location, and the subsequent "cult of relics" that such a phenomenon has produced.[297] Therefore, Treasure items can be considered messianic in the sense that they are believed to be sacred objects retrieved by chosen individuals meant to promote the diffusion of Padmasambhava's teachings and to foster faith in the preservation of the Budhdist doctrine in the land. These apparently miraculous discoveries are not to be understood as being for the benefit of the person who performs or possesses them but rather, if considered genuine, are always believed universally beneficial.

Mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*) present a more complex nature. They are in most cases specific cycles of practices, which tend to be primarily future-oriented, since they are explicit sets and cycles of liturgical and ritual practices, means of achievements (*sādhanā*) meant to be transmitted for present and future practice. In most cases mind Treasures revealed and transmitted by gifted contemplatives eventually become core practices at the heart of specific lineages of teaching transmission. The complexity of the issue therefore lies not just in the nature of the mind Treasure itself, which is a variously long scripture, but in the quality of its content. As we will soon see below this is one of the main criteria adopted in the case of validating the authenticity of a Treasure revealer and his Treasures. From an anthropological perspective Tibetan Treasures can therefore be considered powerful symbolic means to enrich the Buddhist person with charisma and credibility. Additionally, they contribute to the creation of a religious personality as a unique being, a mediator between present life and the idealized golden era of Tibetan history.

In the last decade a few Buddhist figures such as mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, mKhan po A chos, and O rgyan sku gsum gling pa have captured the public imagination among Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist devotees. However, at the time of writing there seem to be more than a dozen religious figures considered Treasure revealers predominantly living in eastern

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[297] I have taken the liberty here to paraphrase a statement by Dan Martin who writes: "The *gter-ma* phenomenon is most generally a cult of relics combined with the romance of discovery." Martin (2001: 19).

Tibet.[298] According to my survey among the most we-known Treasure revealers since the early 1980s are:

1. mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs (1933-2003)
2. Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan (also known as mKhan po A khyug/A chos, b. 1934)
3. O rgyan sKu gsum gling pa (also known as Padma gtum po (1933-2009)
4. gTer chen bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje (b. 1921)
5. Nam sprul ’Jigs med phun tshogs (b. 1944)
6. mKha’ ’gro rin po che Tāre bde chen rgyal mo (also known as Tāre lha mo, 1938-2002)
7. gTer ston lHa rgyal dbang drags rol pa’i rdo rje (also known as lHa rgyal rin po che, b. n.a.)
8. gTer ston lHa mtsho rin po che ’Jigs med rdo rje (also known as lHa mtsho rin po che, b. 1956)
9. gTer ston mThu ldan rdo rje (b. 1941)
10. gTer ston bKra shis rgyal mtshan (b. 1957)
11 Khang sar bsTan pa’i dbang phyug (b. 1938)
12. gSang sprul dKon mchog bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan (b. 1949)
13. Bla ma Kun bzang grags pa (b. 1962)
14. A ’dzoms rgyal sras padma dbang rgyal (also known as Pad lo rin po che, b. 1971)
15. gTer chen Rig ‘dzin nyi ma (b. 1931)
16. A lag a yig ’Jigs med skyid grub (N.A.)
17. gTer ston pad ma dbang rgyal (N.A.)

Although the fame of a few of them goes beyond the borders of their areas, most these religious personalities are active and popular primarily at a local level. This is because the retrieval of Treasure artifacts and cycles of doctrines tends to be contained, at least in the beginning, within a local religious community and is not often publicized outside of it. Although regular contacts are not formalized, some Treasure revealers are in contact with each other, sending representative monks to each other’s encampments, encouraging students to learn from and practice each

[298] The data refer to the period 1997-2006. See bibliography for further details. This study does not cover Treasure revealers in A mdo.

other's traditions, and often supporting each other's teachings and activities. The late mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan have often paid each other visits at their respective residences, bestowed public empowerments, and delivered teachings together. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and bKra shis rgyal mtshan also often cooperate and their respective networks of hermitages and retreat centers are attended by disciples of their respective communities. In 1999 bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje encouraged a small group of his closest nuns to go to study at Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan's Ya chen sgar for some time. bKra shis mtsho mo, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal assistant who is a nun, accompanied the group and brought along, at her teacher's request, a number of her teacher's representative texts, including some Treasure revelations and his autobiography. On that occasion, bKra shis mtsho mo on her teacher's behalf offered bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's writings to Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan. In appreciation of the gesture Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan wrote a formal letter (*phyag bris*) to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje praising his work and revelations.[299]

## *The Dagger of Sublime Wisdom: On Revelation and Consorts*

The actual revelation of both material and mental Treasures, although more in the case of mental Treasures, implies long experience with specific sets of Tantric yogic exercises, visualized or actualized, a number of which are associated with sexual practices. For this reason, Treasure revelation has historically been the domain of largely non-celibate religious figures in the past as it is today.[300] The role of consorts (*thabs grogs*) in Tibetan Buddhism is a relatively recent object of academic interest. In Tibetan literature, however, within the Treasure tradition, such a topic has been covered both in doxographical literature and auto/biographical writings.[301]

In pre-modern Tibet, as today, Treasure revealers have nearly always been non-celibate practitioners and householders who, being Tantric adepts, were not bound to formal monastic vows and thus were free to choose a lifestyle with one or multiple qualified Tantric consorts (*rig ma*; *thabs grogs*; *rdo rje pho nya*; Skt. *vajradūta*). Although not unheard of, monks involved in

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[299] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral and written communication. rDza mer chen monastery. Shar mda', Nang chen, Qinghai. August 21, 2001.
[300] See Kapstein (1992). See Thondup (1986: 82-84) and Jacoby (2007) for the role of consorts in *gter ma* discovery. Germano (1998: 68-72) and Gyatso (1998: 255-56) have also briefly discussed the Treasure revealer's need to be supported by a Tantric consort.
[301] On this topic see especially Jacoby (2007).

revelation have been relatively uncommon in Tibetan society.[302] Tulku Thondup observes that most *gter ston*s were Tantric adepts, living a householder's life with family and children, and that their lifestyle was actually considered a way to transform all experiences into a means to achieve enlightenment.[303] In discussing the role of consorts for Treasure revealers in his *gTer gyi rnam bshad*, rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma (1865-1926) remarks that relying on the miraculous skills of a consort and in accordance with her rebirth as a Treasure revealer's "secret partner" (*gsang grogs*), the Treasure revealer can realize the Treasures teachings (*chos gter*) from the sphere of primordial wisdom.[304]

In his essay on mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, Germano points out that the role of Tantric consorts in Tibetan Buddhism can be very important in Tantric practices and in the revelation of Treasure items. He observes that:

> In Tibetan tantric lineages, women are often said to be of crucial importance as consorts for male visionaries, since it is believed that it is possible to traverse the transcendent path swiftly in reliance on the tantric techniques of sexual yoga; in addition, it is believed that sexual yoga contributes in some essential way to a Terton's ability to reveal treasures.[305]

Germano also remarks that the strict monastic orientation chosen by mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, for instance, has influenced his decision not to accept a destined consort. Such an event apparently resulted in mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's ability to reveal Treasures, especially earth Treasures, only later in his life. This again is explained by the belief that without relying on a consort the visionary's revelation activities are somehow difficult and often result in incomplete revelations.[306]

bKra shis rgyal mtshan, a present-day Treasure revealer and non-celibate Tantric specialist, explains why a destined or "prophesied consort" (*lung zin mkha' 'gro*) is crucial in a Treasure revealer's career:

> There are many prophesied consorts (*lung zin mkha' 'gro*). Depending on the number of Treasures (*gter kha*), these will be assigned to different *mkha' 'gro mas*. This is due to prophecies (*lung bstan*), and to the karmic consequences (*las*). Without all this a single *mkha' 'gro ma* could not get all the karmic

[302] Although among early Treasure revealers, such as tenth century Sangs rgyal bla ma, there are monastics, there are very few cases of monks who engaged in Treasure revelation. Tulku Thondup (1986: 82) mentions two such cases, Padma dbang gi rgyal po (1487-1542) and 'Ja' tshon snying po (1585-1656).
[303] Thondup (1986: 82-83).
[304] Here I paraphrase a paragraph taken from the *gTer gyi rnam bshad* (TNS), f. 16b. See also Thondup (1986: 83).
[305] Germano (1998: 68-69).
[306] Germano (1998: 168, n. 37).

connections for herself. However, if a person unites with many consorts [whom are not prophesied], this [behavior] will give rise to love and hatred (*chags sdang*).[307]

One of the best known Treasure revealing couples in recent times was Nam sprul ’Jigs med phun tshogs (b. 1944) and the late female Treasure revealer mKha’ ’gro Tāre lha mo (mKha’ ’gro rin po che Tāre bde chen rgyal mo, 1938-2002). The couple lived together and led a large community in their encampment sNyan lung sgar in gSer rta county comprised of both monastic and lay Tibetan and Chinese practitioners.[308] The role of female practitioners in Tibetan Buddhism and their function in Treasure revelation and visionary activities has been the object of academic investigation only recently.[309] I will simply note here that like Tāre lha mo, other female Buddhist practitioners today are active as religious personalities who are often Tantric specialists and consorts to Treasure revealers. Other examples include mKha’ ’gro dPal chen lha mo, who is the consort of bKra shis rgyal mtshan in Shar mda’, Nang chen, who is known for her divinatory skills; bDe chen rdo rje sgrol ma rin po che, who currently lives with her partner the Treasure revealer Sangs sprul padma chos dbyings rdo rje at his seat the War sha (Wa rtsa) monastery in Padma county; mKha’ ’gro Tāre (despite the similarity of the name, not to be confused with mKha’ ’gro rin po che Tāre lha mo), present consort of gTer ston lHa mtsho rin po che in Padma county; and mKha’ ’gro rin po che, believed to be a reincarnation of Se ra mkha’ ’gro and currently living with her consort sPrul sku Rang rig rdo rje at Siddhi bde chen gling monastery in rGya rong (Sichuan).[310]

An interesting example of a Treasure revealing couple is gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his wife mKha’ ’gro dPal chen lha mo.[311] A Treasure revealer and *sngags pa*, bKra shis rgyal mtshan was authorized by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje to have his own disciples and students and therefore to give teachings and empowerments. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje also recognized bKra shis rgyal mtshan as a Treasure revealer and incarnation of the ninth-century monk lHa lung dpal gyi rdo rje in 1988 following his own visions and prophetic dreams. Since

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[307] bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s oral communication. sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP, Qinghai), July 2006.
[308] For a biography of the couple, see Padma ’od gsal mtha’ yas (1997) and for its French translation see Buliard (2005). See also Jacoby (2007: 357-361) for her discussion of Nam sprul ’Jigs med phun tshogs and Tāre lha mo as a divinely inspired Treasure revelation couple.
[309] Jacoby (2007); Havnevik (1999, 2005); Gyatso (2005); Schaeffer (2004), Hanna (1994).
[310] Sarah Jacoby is currently working on the biography of mKha’ ’gro rin po che and recently gave a paper about her at the AAR 2007 entitled “Becoming a Ḍākinī in Contemporary Eastern Tibet,” San Diego, CA, 17-20, 2008,
[311] All the information concerning gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan appearing in this study is based exclusively on personal interviews obtained in various occasions during my fieldwork sojourns in Khams in 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000.

1990, bKra shis rgyal msthan has established a number of mountain retreats, mainly nunneries, in Zur mang (Nang chen, Yushu TAP) and Go ’jo, Chab mdo county. His followers includes both lay people and monastics mostly belonging to the rNying ma and bKa’ brgyud traditions. He is predominantly based now in Nang chen where he lives at his residence in Shar mda’.

bKra shis rgyal mtshan realized he was a Treasure revealer when he received a series of visions while studying in retreat as a student of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje when he was thirty-two years old in 1989. bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s potentials for Treasure revelation activities were then announced by a series of visions and prophecies experienced by his root teacher (*rtsa ba’i bla ma*) bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje.[312] Soon after, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje recognized him as a reincarnation he prophesied that in order to fulfill his karmic fate and optimize his career as Treasure revealer, he had to meet his prophesied Tantric consort. In order to honor his teacher prophetic advice, bKra shis rgyal mtshan set off on a long journey to meet his predestined consort following the precise instructions of his teacher. According to his account, bKra shis rgyal mtshan found his prophesied consort dPal chen lha mo exactly where he was told, living in a cave and practicing the Tantric *’pho ba* technique of transmigration of consciousness. Since 1991, bKra shis rgyal mtshan and dPal chen lha mo have lived together in Shar mda’ and sKye rgu mdo area with their five children. They perform a variety of rituals, liturgies, Treasure revelations, and religious activities such as offering mirror divinations for the laity and monastic community alike.

As mKha’ ’gro dpal chen lha mo’s divinatory skills have gained in popularity, her services have made up for the majority of the household income. A few months after bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje identified dPal chen lha mo as bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s prophesied *ḍākinī*/consort (*lung zin mkha’ ’gro*) bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje recognized her as an emanation of the *ḍākinī* Kalasiddhi. An acknowledged and experienced Tantric practitioner, dPal chen lha mo is also renown for her skills as a diviner (*phywa babs mkhan*), returnee from death-like experiences or “revenants” (*’das log ma*), and a performer of what is called “heroic vulture [flight]” (*dpa’ bo’i rgod*). Her expertise in divination is requested in every town or village the couple crosses on its sacred journeys.

dPal chen lha mo claims to be able to see and engage in a dialogical interaction with the deity bKra shis tshe ring ma, the principal goddess of the Five Long Life Sisters (*Tshe ring*

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[312] bKra shis rgyal mtshan is in the process of writing his autobiography. It is my intention to study it  as soon as it is ready.

*mched lnga*). To perform this ritual, dPal chen lha mo arranges an altar dedicated to the goddess by placing an effigy of bKra shis tshe ring ma in the center of a large bowl of rice grains and a large round metal plate (*me long*) in front of it also in the rice grains. The two items are then surrounded by multiple crystal stones and incense sticks. After an introductory recitation of prayers dedicated to the goddess combined with supplications (*gsol 'debs*) to Padmasambhava, dPal che lha mo reads the questions one by one aloud in front of the altar and waits until the responses "appear" on the surface of the *me long*. Once there, dPal chen lha mo reads the phrases to her husband, and bKra shis rgyal mtshan carefully writes them down on a piece of paper.

Since bKra shis rgyal mtshan and dPal chen lha mo settled down in Shar mda' township in 2004, their fame has increased and requests for spiritual advice have multiplied. People from all walks of life reach their residence in the northern outskirts of town at every hour of the day asking for advice. Although requests cover various issues, they predominantly concern health, business, and financial matters, and most of the attendees including both monastics and laypeople leave donations as soon as they give their names and reasons of their requests. bKra shi rgyal msthan and dPal che lha mo perform sometimes up to four sessions of divinations a day during which they satisfy multiple requests.[313]

According to what I have been told during several of my interviews and conversations with bKra shis rgyal mtshan, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje instructed him to help dPal chen lha mo perform divinations in order to prepare himself for the reception of Treasures. Being recognized as a reincarnation of one of Padmasambhava's disciples is apparently not enough; training is needed to understand and be able to decode the Treasure teachings that a Treasure revealer receives.[314] More specifically bKra shis rgyal mtshan needed to perform meditation retreats (*mtshams*) and pilgrimages on foot to Lhasa performing full-body prostrations along the way. The latter was a method to accrue merits (*bsod nams*), purify himself, and eliminate potential defilements (*sgrib pa dag*). Following his teacher's advice, since 1993 bKra shis rgyal mtshan has performed multiple pilgrimage journeys including three to Lhasa doing body-length prostrations. On many occasions he has traveled accompanied by his wife dPal chen lha mo, some of his five children, and a few monks and nuns who assisted him and his family during the journey. During his pilgrimages he also visited sacred places (*gnas chen*) and stayed in caves in

[313] I am currently working on a study of dPal chen lha mo's religious activities and the performance of her divinations.
[314] bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. Ri phug kha mountain hermitage. Yushu TAP, Qinghai, July 2000.

retreat where he practiced meditation. In those caves he found most of his early earth Treasures (*sa gter*). A great number of these are considered Treasure stones (*gter rdo*), which are semi-precious stones believed to bear the blessing of Padmasambhava for the benefit of future sentient beings. On the surface of many of the *gter rdo*, bKra shis rgyal mtshan has identified sacred inscriptions attributed to Padmasambhava. On each Treasure stone bKra shis rgyal mtshan has identified a mark left by Padmasambhava, such as fingerprints, handprints (*phyag rjes*), or scripts. Always aware of his material, spiritual, and geographical surroundings, bKra shis rgyal mtshan embodies the paradigmatic Treasure revealer and ascetic wanderer of contemporary Tibet. When he visits nunneries and monasteries, bKra shis rgyal mtshan is occasionally invited to give teachings, instructions, and personal advice to monks and nuns, and especially to practitioners in retreat in practice buildings (*sgrub khang*). During these visits dPal chen lha mo is often asked to perform divinations for the monks and nuns in retreat.

bKra shis rgyal mtshan's formal career as Treasure revealer took an important turn in the late-1990s thanks to two major revelations that were welcomed with particular enthusiasm within his community. The first event took place in 1998 in a cave he himself opened (*kha phye*), which is annexed to the well-known Bi rnam par snang mdzad temple a few miles east of sKye rgu mdo (Ch. Yushu).[315] While sitting in meditation in the cave, a *ḍākinī*, whom he recognized as Ye shes mtsho rgyal, appeared to him in a vision. She told him to look for a Treasure (*gter kha*) in the soil of the cave just beneath his seat. Following his vision he dug into the soil and found a dagger, which he immediately identified as the *bDud 'dul ba'i shes rab ral gri* (Demon-Taming Dagger of Sublime Wisdom). bKra shis rgyal mtshan believes the dagger belonged to Ye she mtsho rgyal who then hid it there as a Treasure. Quite surprisingly, however, the blade of the dagger has two Chinese characters carved at the base. The engraving represents the word *hù sā*.[316] Here *hù* means "door," "household," "family," and *sā* stands for "let go," "cast," "spread,"

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[315] In a vision experienced a few months before reaching the monastery, bKra shis rgyal mtshan saw this small cave just on the cliff above the monastery. Once he arrived at the monastery, bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his wife set out to search for the cave, and they found it not far from the monastic buildings. bKra shis rgyal mtshan's personal information. (Ri phug kha hermitage, 2000).
Nowadays, the Bi rnam par snang mdzad lha khang or Vairocana Temple is being advertised as Gongzhu si or Princess Temple, in a propagandistic attempt to publicize the influence of Sino-Tibetan relations in the foundation of Buddhism in Tibet. Local authorities emphasize the role of princess Wencheng and the history of the introduction of the Jo bo statue to Tibet. According to the legend the princess and her party stopped there on their way to Lhasa in the eighth century to meet the then emperor Srong btsan sgam po.
[316] This reading follows the *pin yin* transcription and phonetic system.

"scatter."[317] Although, gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan admits to having no insight into the reasons why there are Chinese and not Tibetan words engraved on the blade, he nevertheless commented on this finding by saying the following:

> In 1998 I received the Dagger of Sublime Wisdom (Shes rab ral gri) that once belonged to the mKha' 'gro ma Ye shes mtsho rgyal. She used it to tame and subdue the demons and then hid it as a Treasure in the Brag yab cave. This is a sacred place I newly discovered on the right wing of the Rin mda' [Bi] rnam par snang mdzad [monastery].[318]

Another important retrieval occurred later the same year when gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan was on pilgrimage to several sacred places in the area of sKye rgu mdo.[319] While he was performing the circumambulation of a hill called gNas chen mkha' 'gro 'bum rdzong on the morning of November 17, 1998, he heard voices coming from the sky. None of his fellow pilgrims and travel companions, including dPal chen lha mo and a number of monastics and disciples, could hear the voices. Following the voices, bKra shis rgyal mtshan soon had a visionary experience (*snang nyams*). A group of dancing *ḍākinīs* appeared in the space before him and told him to stop where he was. They pointed to the side of the mountain next to which he was standing and told him he should go to invite a Treasure (*gter kha*) from that site. At that moment, bKra shis rgyal mtshan was standing next to a large boulder. As he approached the large rocky wall, bKra shis rgyal msthan recited prayers such as the Seven-line Prayer to Guru Rinpoche (*tshig bdun gsol 'debs*). He noticed that small stones, gravel, and debris were falling to his feet from a little opening in the rock a few feet above him. Suddenly, a casket (*sgrom bu*) in the form of a round stone the size of a fist spontaneously appeared from within the crack and fell along with debris in front of bKra shis rgyal mtshan. He promptly put the stone chest in his shawl and carefully collected all the medicinal powder that poured out from the opening in the form of *bdud rtsi*, or divine nectar.

Once he and his party had returned to the Ri phug kha mountain hermitage on the slopes of Mount gNas chen padma, bKra shis rgyal mtshan did not touch the Treasure chest (*gter*

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[317] For the Chinese characters see 户(*hù*) n. 2141 (p. 408), and 撒(*sā*) n. 4186 (p.786) of the *Dictionnaire Français de la Langue Chinoise* (1990). I have personally seen the dagger mentioned above and copied the two Chinese characters.

[318] "*Brag yab rin mda' rnam par snang mdzad kyi g.yas phyogs gnas chen gnas gsar phug pa de yi nang nas mkha' 'gro ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi bdud 'dul ba'i shes rab ral gri gter la sbas pa dus la babs tshe 1998 lo nas spyan 'drang ba'o.*" gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral and written communication. Ri phug kha Mountain Hermitage, sKye rgu mdo, August 8th, 1999.

[319] bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. Ri phug kha mountain hermitage. Yushu TAP, Qinghai, July 2000.

*sgrom*) until the appropriate time and auspicious circumstances were manifest. The opportunity occurred a week later when bKra shis rgyal mtshan had visions announcing that the appropriate time had come for the opening of the Treasure chest. bKra shis rgyal msthan summoned his wife, some monks and nuns, and a few devotees who were visiting. His monks and nuns cleaned and put the room in order and paid their respects with homage to the sacred casket by performing full body prostrations. They all sat down in the room close to bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his wife and chanted recitations. According to bKra shis rgyal mtshan's own account, he then removed the silk scarves from around the casket. As he was holding it in his hands and gazing upon it, the chest suddenly opened and a small sphere of blazing light flew in the air and dissolved into bKra shis rgyal mtshan's mind, infusing him with knowledge of a spiritual teaching.

bKra shis rgyal mtshan explained that in the following days he transcribed the teachings he realized into a scripture and gave it the collective title of *Bram ze skyes reg ril bu'i sbyor ba* (The Preparation of the Brahmin Touching Pills). One of the main aspects of such a collection of teachings is the production and use of the *bram ze'i ril bu*, or Brahmin's Pills. These medicinal pellets contain several medicinal plants and sacred substances including the nectar gathered from the Treasure door (*gter sgo*) during the retrieval and are highly valued for their ability to heal the body and their capacity to inspire spiritual liberation. According to bKra shis rgyal mtshan, if the devotee ingests the pill with a pure and faithful mind, the power of the substance will immediately help him to attain inner realization.[320] In addition, he believes that the *bram ze'i ril bu* can be helpful against contaminations (*sgrib*) of various origins induced by malevolent spirits such as evilness (*gnyan sgrib*), "rahu" spirits (*gza' sgrib*), and arrogance (*dregs sgrib*). They are believed to cure three hundred and thirty-six diseases.[321]

One of the religious roles Treasure revealers play in their communities is that of manipulating and controlling the environment and sacred space. bKra shis rgyal mtshan has excavated hundreds of material Treasures and, as we have just seen, he has recently started revealing mental Treasures (*dgongs gter*) as well, often aided by the presence of his consort. Whenever bKra shis rgyal mtshan has a premonition about a forthcoming Treasure, he consults with his wife in order to prepare himself. One particular skill that occasionally bKra shis rgyal mtshan asks of his wife is her assistance in identifying and locating Treasure places (*gter gnas*)

[320] gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. Ri phug kha Mountain Hermitage, sKye rgu mdo, August 8th, 1999. Cf. Thondup (1986: 152).
[321] gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. Ri phug kha Mountain Hermitage, sKye rgu mdo, August 8th, 1999.

that have been announced to bKra shis rgyal mtshan in visionary experience. In this case, dPal chen lha mo arranges a special mirror divination session in which she asks her tutelary deity bKra shis tshe ring ma, the goddess of long life, to provide more details and assist her in the place localization process. Once the response has been granted, if the way to find the Treasure place is still obscure, sometimes dPal chen lha mo performs an additional ritual that she calls the "heroic vulture [flight]" (*dpa' bo'i rgod*).

bKra shis rgyal mtshan and dPal chen lha mo explained that the performance of the heroic vulture flight is similar to that of the *'das log* in that she is apparently capable of abandoning her body in a trance-like state for an undetermined length of time to enter the body of a vulture. Vultures, *bya rgod* in Tibetan, and often called *rgod* in sKye rgu mdo and Nang chen, are powerful animals for Tibetans who often associate them with charnel grounds (*dur khrod*) and funerary rites.[322] During her "flights" dPal che lha mo believes that she has visited remote areas in eastern Tibet in search for the places his Treasures (*gter gnas*) are located. She recounts that on a number of occasions she has even experienced eating human flesh at charnel grounds! She performs the extraordinary feat of flying over the presumed destination of the Treasure revealer and searching the area for the forthcoming Treasure excavation site to facilitate its identification. Therefore, dPal chen lha mo's "mastery over the vulture [flight]" (*rgod kyi grub pa*) as it is also called is often of crucial help to bKra shis rgyal mtshan, and her skills have been essential in many of his revelations.[323]

Beyond the supernatural elements of such enterprises, the relationship between bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his wife dPal chen lha mo is important in that it shows how a couple interacts and participates in the performance of religious activities in the service of their community. Despite the pertinence of consort practices to revelation, such an aspect of Tantric practice has been often criticized by some Tibetan Buddhist leaders of the recent past, such as the late mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, thus reviving the centuries-old debate on the validity of Treasure revealers and the authenticity of their revelations.

[322] gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan and dPal chen lha mo's oral communication (August 2001). Vultures (*bya rgod*) seem to be given high status as heavenly creatures and their role in helping human beings is widely recognized in Tibetan societies (Samuel 1993: 211; 218). Trance-like flights such as those reported by dPal chen lha mo are occasionally experienced by gTer chen bKra shi rgyal mtshan himself who has told me he can displace at will his consciousness into a raven (*bya rog*) and, therefore, can fly as one.
[323] bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP, Qinghai), July 2006.

## *Consorts, Noncelibacy, and the Debate about Authentic Treasure Revealers*

In Chapter One we saw how in pre-modern Tibet some of these issues were addressed in the writings of certain Tibetan Buddhist scholars. The tone of such a debate today has taken a slightly different angle if we examine the arguments current writers employ to validate Treasure revealers in contemporary Tibet. mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs (1934-2003), one of the most revered Buddhist leaders of mGo log, was a fully-ordained monk and was well-known for his Treasure revelations. He was also renowned for his strict position concerning ethical behavior among both monastic and non-celibate Buddhist practitioners. In a collection of advice published posthumously under with the title *Chos rje dam pa ’jigs med phun tshogs ’byung gnas dpal bzang po mchog gi mjug mtha’i zhal gdams rang tshugs ma shor/ gzhan sems ma dkrugs zhes pa’i ’grel ba lugs gnyis blang dor gsal ba’i sgron me* (The radiant lamp that discriminates between the two systems: A comment on the undisturbed minds of others, or the sublime and excellent lord of the Dharma ’Jigs med phun tshogs ’byung gnas dpal bzang po’s ultimate stable and unerring advice" henceforth *Zhal gdams*), mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs elaborated on both the importance of maintaining pure vows and commitments and the problematic aspect of immoral behavior among non-celibate Tantric professionals (*sngags pa khyim pa*) including Treasure revealers.[324] Because of his full ordination, mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs tended to promote a Vinaya-influenced approach to morality and ethical decorum, which is evident in many of his statements.

mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs directs his criticism to the class of householder Tantric professionals (*sngags pa*) and Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) who, according to him, indulge in immoral and unethical behavior while lacking real knowledge of esoteric practice. In the specific case of Treasure revealers, he expresses concern for the use and misuse of "real" Treasure teachings by charlatans (*zog po*) who commit plagiarism by appropriating revelations performed by authentic Treasure revealers from the past and diffusing them as their own productions. He also claims that many Tantric professionals pretend to be Treasure revealers and compose practice texts full of mistakes and disorganized teachings, which they then disseminate as Treasure teachings (*gter chos*) and ḍākinī codes (*mkha’ ’gro’i brda*).[325]

[324] bsTan ’dzin rgya mtsho (2005).
[325] bsTan ’dzin rgya mtsho (2005: 38-39).

mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs epitomizes a view of the Buddhist monastic community’s perception of Treasure revealers and more generally Tantric professionals. One criterion of validity is the Treasure revealer’s attitude and behavior, such as the way he interacts with the people around him, the community he leads and represents, and the way he conducts his religious activities. These aspects relate primarily to the moral and ethical behavior of the individual. Another criterion is the quality and validity of his revealed teachings (*gter chos*). Usually both these criteria are considered when it comes to the analysis and recognition of a genuine Treasure revealer, with one aspect, the former, often overshadowing the latter. However, as the Third rDo grub chen ’Jigs med bstan pa’i nyi ma also observes, behavior (*spyod pa*) per se should not necessarily constitute a reliable means of authenticating Treasure revealers since authentic non-celibate Tantric professionals have often been known for their bizarre, unconventional, and often “apparently” immoral manner.[326]

Some contemporary Treasure revealers believe that criteria for the evaluation of a Treasure revealer’s authenticity should focus on the quality of his revelations, not on the revealer’s behavior. In other words, a non-celibate Treasure revealer’s lifestyle and attitude should not affect the legitimacy of his services. bKra shis rgyal mtshan strongly supports this view and, according to him, it is only through an accurate examination of a Treasure revealer’s collected revelation material that an educated and authoritative religious personality can recognize the reliability of a Treasure revealer’s claims and the validity of his teachings. During an interview I conducted with him, bKra shis rgyal mtshan proclaimed:

> The way to understand the validity of a Treasure revealer is to analyze his Treasure teachings since just looking at a person is not enough to understand if he is a Treasure revealer or not. If we look at his Treasure teachings, then we can understand [if he’s an authentic Treasure revealer]. It is important to see if there is the *guru sādhanā* and what the quality of it is, and then if his collection include *yi dam sādhanā* and *mkha’ ’gro sādhanā*. Additionally, we must see if among all his [Treasure] teachings there is also the triad of the *mnan bsregs ’phangs gsum*.[327] Without this material an individual cannot be considered an authentic Treasure revealer. But if someone wants to be sure if a Treasure revealer is authentic, he should ask to look at his collected Treasures so he can analyze them.[328]

[326] Thondup (1996: 157).
[327] *Sri mnan pa gdon bgegs bsregs pa gtor zor ’phangs pa ste gsum*, or the sri/demon suppression, burning obstructing spirits, throwing *gtor ma*.
[328] bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s personal oral communication. sKye rgu mdo (Yushu, Qinghai), July 2006.

One point that bKra shis rgyal mtshan clearly emphasizes in the statement above is that their validity is not dependent on what sort of people Treasure revealers are or what behavior they manifest. An evaluation of the validity of their revelations based exclusively on their apparent attitude and behavior is not sufficient.

Interestingly, in the *Zhal gdams*, mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs’s observations about authentic Treasure revealers take a sudden and unexpected turn when he discusses issues of ethical behavior. A major criticism that he specifically directs against non-celibate Treasure revealers concerns their sexual misconduct (*spyod ngan*). mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs criticizes several Treasure revealers’ custom of having multiple consorts.[329] Additionally, he is also very critical of their laxity and immoral behavior by indulging in drinking and sensory pleasures under the pretext of acting in accordance with their Tantric training. Again, in his *Zhal gdams* mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs elaborates on non-celibate Tantric professionals and Treasure revealers proclaiming:

> Without any knowledge of winds, channels, and seminal nuclei but motivated by desire deceived as necessity, they (the non-celibate Treasure revealers) engage with many women. Despite being absolutely devoid of any of the fundamentals of the generation and perfection phases, they engage [in the practice of liberating/killing enemies by the wrathful application] of the karma of destruction motivated by hatred. Also, motivated by desire, they make unrestrained use of servants.[330]

The reservations against non-celibate Treasure revealers’ Tantric practices that mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs unveils in the passage above are quite emblematic of his concern to purify Buddhist lineages from immoral behavior and ethical transgressions. mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs’s firm convictions about maintaining the purity of vows and supporting ethical and institutional conservatism even prevented him from pursuing his prophesied career as a great Treasure revealer. According to his biography, he once received a prophetic catalogue (*lung byang*) indicating that a “consort” would offer herself to him to fulfill their common past karmic aspirations. Had he accepted her, he would have gained access to the gates of five profound Treasures that would have corrected the decay due to the times of turmoil and “make the sun of happiness shine over the land of snows.”[331] Apparently, things did not go exactly as the prophecy announced; mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs did once meet a woman who offered herself to him

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[329] For the role of consorts in Tantric Buddhism see Jacoby (2007), Young (2004), Simmer-Brown (2001), and Shaw (1994).
[330] *Zhal gdams* (2003: 38).
[331] bSod dar rgyas (1990: 37). Sodarjey (2001: 52).

as a spiritual consort, but he didn't comply with her intentions. When he was at gNubs lung trying to open a large Treasure door, the auspicious signs did not become manifest. While staying at the cave apparently something fantastic happened:

> A young woman showing all kinds of signs of realization appeared in front of him and said "We have the mind mandate transmission from previous aspirations. I am your karmic consort."
> But the Master thought to himself "Generally, I don't feel like being judgmental. However, the knowledge-holders who inquire beyond worldly existence in accordance with the instructions of the profound path say: 'Of all the illusions, the female illusion is the most extraordinary.' This is highly admirable. Nowadays, the mentality of ordinary people is disgraceful. Moved by personal motivations, they engage in perverse acts of pleasure in the guise of [acting with] disciplined behavior. At this point, I won't do it [i.e., engage with a consort]. Instead, I will follow the exemplary model of the teachings."[332]

Thus mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs favored monasticism and the purity of Vinaya precepts and refused to engage with consorts, aware of the fact that neglecting his prophesied consort would have an affect on his revelations. According to him, only those who truly persevere towards the path of realization by exerting themselves in accomplishment practice (*bsnyen sgrub*) can be real Treasure revealers.[333]

But why are women involved in such a debate? How can the number of consorts a Treasure revealer engages with have an effect on a Treasure revealer's authority? In other words, do morality issues fit as criteria to validate the authenticity of Treasure revealers? My sense is that mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs attempted to add a moral tone to the discourse by associating moral and ethical behavior with the authenticity of a Treasure revealer. However, his comments seem to underestimate a crucial point: historically, most Treasure revealers were non-celibate and many had multiple female consorts. Tibetan scholars have often directly or indirectly pointed out the key role of consorts for Treasure revealers. In the passage above, does mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs criticize promiscuous behavior? Or rather is he critical of the performance of consort practice? My impression is that mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs privileges monastic ethics over consort practice, despite its importance for the revelation of Treasures.

Consort practices are a type of skillful means (*thabs lam*; Skt. *upāya*) that have a central role in the Treasure revelation system. As rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma clarifies,

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[332] bSod dar rgyas (1990: 36). Sodarjey (2001: 50–51). This translation is mine.
[333] For a study of the concept of "sex" in Buddhism monasticism see Gyatso (2005).

there are two reasons for a Treasure revealer to have a consort for his practice. The first is that the union of the Treasure revealer with a consort represents and intensifies the ultimate state of bliss (*bde*) and emptiness (*stong*), a state that optimizes the reception of mind Treasures. In this case, the support of a consort in the revelation process enhances the revealer's power to decode or decipher the symbolic scripts in which the Treasure often first appears.[334] The second purpose is the fulfillment of a consort's karmic connection with the Treasure revealer and the commitment to complete the mission to reveal the Treasure for the benefit of sentient beings.[335]

Recently, in her study of the great female Treasure revealer Se ra mKha' 'gro (1892-1940), Sarah Jacoby has pointed out how consorts play an important role in revelation. In her words:

> Treasure revelation is founded upon a Tantric understanding of the body in which mental realizations are generated from manipulating the channels, winds, and seminal nuclei of the subtle body (*rtsa, rlung, thig le*). Unique to the Treasure tradition is the link between the generation of textual and material Treasures and the biologically generative act of sexuality. Specifically, the role of the female consort is linked to Yeshé Tsogyal's mnemonic and encoding powers; female consorts aid Treasure revealers in their process of decoding the Treasure's symbolic scripts."[336]

Such a view is also confirmed by some current Treasure revealers. According to bKra shis rgyal mtshan, a consort (*thabs grogs*) is an important companion for a Treasure revealer's practice, although it is not the *conditio sine qua non* of Treasure revelation. A Treasure revealer can still reveal Treasures, especially material objects such as earth Treasures (*sa gter*) without a consort, and a few can even become great Treasure revealers, as in the case of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs and Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan (also known as mKhan po A chos). However, as bKra shis rgyal mtshan's comments clearly illustrate in the following passage, in the process of Tantric practice the cooperation of a consort can increase the Treasure revealer's powers to reveal more Treasures, especially mind Treasures:

> If a high being who is a *ḍākinī* unites with a great Treasure revealer of superior birth they will obtain great achievements and then they will be able to retrieve many Treasures. This is known as 'interconnection of method and wisdom' (*thabs shes kyi rten 'brel*) and it is also called the 'true nature of the auspicious connections' (*rten 'brel gyi chos nyid*). Then, for instance, if there is a teacher who is a Treasure revealer without a consort, he will be like a single person having only the

[334] Thondup (1986: 130).
[335] Thondup (1986: 82–83).
[336] Jacoby (2007: 102; and 233–239).

> power (*shugs*) of one person being without a partner, since the double power coming from a couple will not be possible.[337]

It is my sense that the custom among many non-celibate Tantric specialists and Treasure revealers of having more than one consort and the ambiguity of such a situation disturbs religious figures committed to a monastic lifestyle and who support celibate monastic institutions such as mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs. Nevertheless, bKra shis rgyal mtshan justifies having more than one consort through linking this behavior to prophecy. He remarks:

> The fact that some Treasure revealers have more than a single consort depends on both [personal] necessity and required conditions. Some [Treasure revealers] have more than one prophesied *mkha’ ’gro ma*; others have just one. It’s up to them to comply with the prophecies or not and to decide to have only one consort or many.[338]

On the topic of prophesied consorts for a Treasure revealer, bKra shis rgyal mtshan observes:

> There are many prophesied/predestined consorts (*lung zin mkha’ ’gro*), but if one is not an authentic *mkha’ ’gro ma* then we talk about karmic tendencies. [In that case] It will be only a question of desiring a woman who gives pleasure. But since it is not a necessity [for the practice], she won’t be beneficial. It will not be of any benefit to the retrieval of Treasures, but only to personal pleasure. Without a consort being prophesied it will be harmful and detrimental not only to one’s own experience and realization, but also to all the Treasures. For instance, there are some people who say they are Treasure revealers whose prophesied consorts have been announced in the statements and prophecies of their teachers but they never actually engaged with them [the consorts]. However, since they do not engage with their consorts, they don’t have many Treasure teachings. Thus, it will be said that they are not good Treasure revealers and that their consorts are not good *mkha’ ’gro ma*.[339]

bKra shis rgyal mtshan goes a step further in his discussion of consort practice when he frames the practice in the larger context of skilful means (*thabs lam*):

> What is called method and wisdom [practice] is generally considered to be an interconnection of events (*rten ’brel*). Relying on such an auspicious conjunction of events will result in the production of many more virtues. If [a Treasure revealer] needs to retrieve a material Treasure from the ground, for instance, or if there is a Treasure teaching to be received, he should engage in the performance of method activities (*thabs bya*) for a period of time, meaning performing the method and wisdom practice with a *mkha’ ’gro ma*. This would be the result of the auspicious conjunction of events. We

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[337] bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s personal oral communication. Interview. sKye rgu mdo, Yushu TAP, Qinghai, December 2005.
[338] bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s personal oral communication. Interview. sKye rgu mdo, Yushu TAP, Qinghai, December 2005.
[339] bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s personal oral communication. Interview. sKye rgu mdo, Yushu TAP, Qinghai, July 2006.

> call these main practices the path of skilful means (*thabs lam*), and they consist of what in Tibetan is also called 'having intercourse.' Therefore, in this case, *thabs lam*, as reported in many Tibetan writings, consists of a series of activities including mental thoughts, upward and downward movements of the seminal nuclei (*thig le*), and the four levels of joy such as the *dga' ba*, *mchog dga'*, *dga' bral*, *lhan skyes dga'*, which are experienced during a union between a man and a woman and therefore also between a *mkha' 'gro ma* and a Treasure revealer."[340]

In this passage, bKra shis rgyal mtshan emphasizes the soteriological aspect of *thabs lam* practice, according to which the union of "method and wisdom" (*thabs dang shes rab*) has the potential to create favorable circumstances and liberate the mind. In short, non-celibate Tantric figures perceive sexual union in yogic practice as an implement to intensify a state of psychological receptivity that is pivotal to their spiritual advancement and the revelation of Treasures. In Tibet, consort practices are supported by a corpus of ritual systems, namely Yogatantra and Mahāyoga, stemming back to as early as the eighth century.[341]

Therefore, although he admits that the use of consorts is optional, bKra shis rgyal mtshan believes that a consort can assist along the path to enlightenment. Thus a Treasure revealer's visionary activity can be optimized through the combination of the practice of channels, winds, and seminal nuclei along with consort practice, where union with a consort creates an additional support (*lag rten*). In this regard bKra shis rgyal mtshan observes that:

> For those who do not know how to practice the channels, winds, and seminal nuclei, if they are Treasure revealers, they can reveal Treasure teachings anyway, but it won't be the same. All the paths of practice reach Buddhahood. Just like reaching the Pure Land, the purpose is the same. Meditations through the generation phase (*bskyed rim*), the perfection phase (*rdzogs rim*), and channels, winds, and seminal nuclei (*rtsa rlung thig le*) all have the same purpose, removing obscuration (*sgrib pa dag*). However, if there are interconnections of events conducive to practicing with a consort, then this is particularly good. But one is also allowed to practice by himself [i.e. without a consort]. A Treasure revealer with a consort can practice with her since the consort is his support (*lag rten*) and she is therefore called female support (*mi mo lag rten*). This is just like Mi la ras pa whose female support was [the deity] Tshe ring ma. Relying on her as his support he practiced his channels, winds, and seminal nuclei and attained Buddhahood.[342]

In the example above, however, Mi la ras pa's consort was not a human being but a deity, Tshe ring ma. The Tantric union, therefore, is not reduced to mere physical actions between two

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340 bKra shis rgyal mtshan's personal oral communication. Interview. sKye rgu mdo, Yushu TAP, Qinghai, December 2005.
341 Dalton (2004: 4).
342 bKra shis rgyal mtshan's personal oral communication. sKye rgu mdo, Yushu TAP, Qinghai, July 2006.

partners.[343] Rather it seems to represent a Tantric understanding of the body that once applied is supposed to favor the ritual attunement between the two practitioners whether physical or visualized. The blissful state that such a union generates in the Treasure revealer is supposedly employed in the ritual environment to facilitate the process of revelation and especially the decoding of visionary messages.[344]

If we consider the data information explored so far, we realize that one criterion that can be employed in the identification of an authentic Treasure revealer is the behavior and the conduct of the Treasure revealer and more generally of the entire non-celibate Tantric community. Another criterion is the quality and the consistency of their revelations. Although the latter is more likely to constitute a standard procedure for determining the authenticity of Treasure revealers' literary production, 'Jigs med phun tshogs adds a moral tone to the debate over authenticity as if to defend the tradition from outside critics who misunderstand Treasure revealers' non-celibate lifestyles to be expressions of moral laxity. A reading of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's advice in the *Zhal gdams* shows that the unconventional extravagant or "crazy" (*smyon pa*) and often questionable behavior of non-celibate Tantric practitioners and Treasure revealers still seems, as in the past, still to foster criticism by religious elites belonging to the monastic tradition. Most non-celibate religious specialists, however, agree on the idea that Treasure revealers cannot be judged or validated by analyzing their behavior and that only an analysis of their collection of Treasures can ultimately provide legitimacy to their visionary claims.

I conclude therefore that, in terms of taxonomical formulations, Treasure revealers' authenticity springs mainly from three sources. First of all, a Treasure revealer's claimed and/or recognized link with his past as one of the principle disciples of Padmasambhava; second, his realization as a Tantric practitioner; and third, the quality and comprehensive nature of his revealed Treasures. The latter, as we have seen above, entails an accurate investigation of the Treasure revealer's *gter chos*, or Treasure scriptures, which should ideally be a broad collection of the three major *bla rdzogs thugs* (lama [Padmasambhava], [Great] Perfection, and Compassion [Avalokiteśvara]) cycles of practice. The one who investigates and validates a Treasure revealer's authenticity must be an exceptional Buddhist master. This, however, seems to be appropriate as *a posteriori* type of investigation, whereas the *a priori* investigation of a

[343] Shaw (1994: 141-142).
[344] Gyatso (1998: 257-259).

Treasure revealer is instead based on his force of prophecy and vision. These are manifest predominantly before the would-be Treasure revealer has begun his career and produced entire cycles of practice according to his mandate.

The debate seems to be open regarding the proper behavior and conduct that a Treasure revealer should display in order to be credible and to provide a good image and model to the Buddhist community. But are Treasure revealers supposed to be models for the communities they live in? In general, I would say that from a reading of the pertinent literature and the data provided by informed individuals I have interviewed that this is not always the case. However, leaders such as the late mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs argued that they must be models given that he emphasized moral conduct in addition to the traditional criteria for determining the validity of a Treasure revealer. mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's remarks clearly indicate that in the changed circumstances of present-day Tibet, in which Buddhism is open to not only sectarian criticism, but also state censure, the Treasure tradition can hardly afford to be perceived as morally corrupt.

## *The Mobility of Religion: Treasure Revealers and Communication Technology*

On a warm summer day in August 2000, I was sitting in a crowded Tibetan restaurant in the market place of sKye rgu mdo (Ch. Yushu) writing notes in my journal while sipping a cup of Tibetan butter tea. Around me small clusters of Tibetan monks and ordinary people were busy chatting, eating, or simply drinking tea while other diners were attentively watching a Kung Fu movie on a video compact disc (VCD) player on the big screen of a television set. At the end of the hit Chinese movie the owner of the restaurant put on another VCD. As the VCD player started, the images appearing on the screen immediately drew my attention. A Tibetan teacher appeared who was leading a public teachings session for a large mass of people gathered in front of him in what looked like a monastery courtyard. As soon as the image zoomed in on the religious figure's face I immediately recognized mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs. An older man standing on the threshold of the restaurant took his hat off, mumbled prayers, and united his palms in front of his chest. I inquired about the video we were watching from the owner of the restaurant who told me that he got the VCD from his daughter, a nun at the religious encampment of bLa rung sgar. What I was watching was a promotional video of mKhan po 'Jigs

med phun tshogs publicizing his travels, his community, and the religious activities including a few spectacular Treasure retrievals.

In a modern world expanding its communication and cultural boundaries at an impressive speed and reaching even the remote areas of Tibet, tourism, new information technologies, media, and new forms of communication are rapidly modifying Tibetan lives and cultural landscapes. With China's encouraging attitude towards spatial mobility, social interaction, and the increasing presence of modern technologies across the country, Tibetans have started to promote and project religious symbols via modern forms of mass communication. In a culture such as Tibet where devotees regularly carry religious symbols such as reliquaries, amulets, and blessed items of talismanic value on their bodies, new technologies including pictures, posters, pins, pamphlets, and autobiographies of teachers, and also VCDs, DVDs, audio cassettes, and digital cameras are nowadays common means of promotion and can be readily found almost everywhere in Tibet. Moreover, as a consequence of the increased presence in Tibet of international aid and development agencies, NGOs, international medical organizations, charity organizations, cultural, spiritual, and adventure tourism, human rights monitors, and Tibetologists, knowledge of the Tibetan religious world is being increasingly inserted into the global network of information communication that characterizes today's cultural discourses. Most Tibet-related issues and news are now readily accessible on the Internet. The fame of some of the present Treasure revealers has transcended the boundaries of Tibet and reached an international audience.[345]

Thanks especially to communication media, such as audio cassettes, CDs, and VCDs, the impact of technology on the practice of religion in Tibet has been extraordinary. A consequence of the new means of mass communication is that they are promoting a growth in the mobility of religious symbols across Tibet. As studies by Babb and Wadley have demonstrated, this wave of change in Asia has altered the way in which religious culture can be transmitted.[346] The revolutionary effect of audio cassettes and CDs in Tibet can be appreciated if we consider that the popularity of religious personalities and their religious communities outside eastern Tibet can

[345] mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, Padma gtum po sKu gsum gling pa, and A 'dzoms rgyal sras Padma dbang rgyal (b. 1972) are among those Treasure revealers who have traveled to southeast Asia and to the West.

[346] Babb and Wadley (1995). In 2004 while staying at bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's resident at rDza mer chen monastery I showed a CD to a Tibetan yak herder visiting the old teacher. The CD contained images and footage of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's activities but no photo or words were printed on the surface of the disk. When I told the herder what the content of the CD was he respectfully grabbed my hand and put it on the top of his head as a sign of reverence and respect.

be attributed largely to the circulation of this technology. Cassettes, CDs, and especially VCDs of teachers such as mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, O rgyan sKu gsum gling pa, and A ’dzoms rgyal sras padma dbang rgyal can be found not only within Tibetan regions of Sichuan, Qinghai, and TAR, but also in urban areas of mainland China such as Chengdu and Xining.

The distribution of home-made, bootlegged, and privately sponsored audio, visual, and printed religious and biographical material in Tibet is a particularly interesting phenomon. Through their ubiquitous and intrusive character audio and video materials have changed the structure of religious practice and attendance at religious functions in Tibet. Many devotees return home from such events with recorded material making the private experience available to a larger audience such as friends, relatives, acquaintances, and diners at a restaurant. CDs can be listened to multiple times and DVDs watched over again aiding in the memorization of teachings. In this new environment the participation in religious events becomes collectible material and cultural encounters can be commercialized. Music, devotional songs accompanied by folk and pop Tibetan tunes, and videos of Buddhist teacher and Treasure revealers are now common entertainment in many restaurants in eastern Tibet and are available in market places in urban areas thus popularizing devotionalism and letting Tibetans participate in the China-inspired marketization of Tibetan culture.[347]

Additionally, the marketing of public religious figures including Treasure revealers has increased due to the increased amount of religious literature published domestically and abroad. The availability of such literature, including autobiographies, scriptures, prayer manuals, and spiritual instructions has simplified the propagation of information about religion, contemporary teachers, and their communities. These technologies have projected many contemporary Treasure revealers and Tantric professionals as trans-local entities and “being there” is not anymore the *conditio sine qua non* for receiving the teachings and performing practices. VCDs of major Buddhist scholars and of all the aforementioned Treasure revealers in this thesis can be found in Tibetan, Chinese and sometimes with English translation often accompanied by karaoke style music. As the case of mKhan po ’Jigs med phun tshogs’s religious encampment illustrates, there is a significant amount of privately sponsored and published literary material coming not only from bLa rung sgar’s printing house, but also from abroad, particularly from Taiwan and

[347] Davis (2005).

Hong Kong, home of many Buddhist centers opened by his disciples and followers. The video footages, like the various pamphlets, cover some aspects of the late Buddhist teacher's activities, including teachings, public speeches, advice, and biographical anecdotes. They often include descriptions of his Treasure revelations with photos of items, footprints, and miraculous apparitions.[348]

Modernization in Tibet, as sponsored by the PRC government, involves different means of urbanization, education, technology, and social mobility with varying degrees of success.[349] Along with consumer articles such as motorbikes, televisions, VCRs, and VCDs that Tibetans have enjoyed in the last decade, the Internet is a new arrival. Internet in Asian countries in general and China specifically is developing quicker than in any other region of the world. It must be noted that new information and communication technologies such as the Internet in the PRC in particular are heavily affected by government monitoring policies.[350] New technologies such as computer facilities and the Internet are booming in most provinces of the PRC including small villages of Khams and A mdo. Although most of the customers are young people playing videogames on the computer, many among them are familiar with browsing the Internet for research, chatting on-line, and e-mailing.

At bLa rung sgar, for instance, thanks to the donations and financial support of hundreds of Chinese Buddhist devotees who flock to the religious center every year, a computer room was organized in 2000 with several desktop computers having Internet connections. A printing house had been established in the late 1990s where mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs's teachings, Buddhist didactic material, and reprints of Buddhist classics were printed for both Tibetan and

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[348] See for instance the publications by Thub bstan nor bu, who leads the La Rong Buddhist Institute in Taipei, Taiwan (Ningmaba larong sancheng falin foxuehui), a representative office of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs' bLa rung theg gsum chos gling (bLa rung sgar). In the early 2000s Thub bstan nor bu published a series of books including a biography of mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs in Chinese (*Jinmei pengcuo fawang zhuang. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche: A Biography*) and a collection of songs by Mu med ye shes mtsho, mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs' niece (*rJe btsun mu med ye shes mtsho mo'i bstod pa phyogs bsgrigs tshang sras dgyes pa'i rol mtsho*). In 1996 he also published a series of instructions by mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, *Dus rabs nyer gcig pa'i gangs can pa rnams la phul ba'i snying gtam sprin gyi rol mo*. Other examples of biographies of present Tibetan Treasure revealers published abroad are those of sKu gsum gling pa and A 'dzoms rgyal sras padma dbang rgyal. See A bu dkar lo (2003) and 'Gyur med tshe ring (2006) respectively.

[349] For a recent discussion on various topics related to China's modernization and developmental policies in Tibet see Blondeau and Buffetrille (2002), and Norbu (2002). For a survey of China's economic policy in the Western region of the PRC see also TIN (2000).

[350] See Ho, Kluven, and Yang (2003) for a significant contribution to the study of the development of Internet in Asian countries. It is worth noting here, though, that PRC's policy concerning diffusion of the information in China is still at the center of recent debates on freedom of expression and censorship in the PRC. See for instance the recent report produced by The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School, available on-line at http://www.cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/china.

Chinese students. Most of the printed matter including textbooks and reading material is now assigned to the publishing house where young monks familiar with both written Tibetan and word processing read, correct, and edit old texts and then republish them.

In the last five years the PRC government has become more aware of the possibilities of the Internet and of its potentials. Although on the one hand the PRC has focused on restrictions and limits to Internet access, on the other it has increased its information network on various topics including ethnic minority policies. Local authorities have also launched their provincial-level websites largely focused on tourism and propaganda-style information about local activities, business, and commercial advertising.[351] The improvement in information technology has focused on the dissemination of information about Tibet and ethnic Tibetan areas of the PRC in which a stereotyped image of ethnic communities and minority culture is marketed to attract domestic tourists. The attempts and successes in reviving and maintaining traditional forms of Buddhist practice and activities in Tibet is a phenomenon that is not confined to one Treasure revealer only. Buddhism in its various traditions and specifically Tibetan Buddhism has been spreading world-wide in recent decades. Addressing global Buddhism, Baumann has observed that Buddhism has been established in several countries. In many cases single countries, including Asian countries, now host a number of different Buddhist traditions, which is historically unprecedented.[352]

Globalizing forces are shaping and re-shaping much of the cultural geography worldwide and Tibetan Buddhism is no exception to this trend. More specifically, the success of Buddhism in its Tibetan variations seems to be attributed to its flexibility to adapt to various circumstances especially in the new global context. Samuel has pointed out how compatibility with modern science, and ecology, and a message of non-violence are among the outstanding reasons for Tibetan Buddhism's success as a world religion in our time.[353] Information about Buddhism in all its traditions, including teachings, teachers, and international Buddhist centers, can be accessed now in an unprecedented way. Internet technology allows culture to be promulgated at a very high rate. We can access more and more information about almost anything via the Internet, even about Treasure revelation! A simple Google search online by typing "Treasure

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[351] See TIN's *China's Tibet Online: Tibet and Tibetans in PRC Government Websites* at http://www.tibetinfo.net/news-update/2003/websr/0309.htm.

[352] Baumann (2001: 2), and (2002). See also Prebish (2002).

[353] Samuel (1995). I am grateful to Geoffrey Samuel for having granted me permission to cite his opinion from his unpublished work. See also Samuel (2005: 288-344).

revelation," "Terma tradition," or "Terton" will bring up a long list of websites and Buddhist portals with all sorts of information about Tibetan Treasures and their revealers, including an essay on "Terma (Buddhism)" in the booming *Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia*.[354] Encouraged and helped by their Chinese Buddhist devotees several Chinese language websites dedicated to Treasure revealers in Tibet have also appeared on the Internet. At the time of writing this dissertation, a number of Tibetan Treasure revealers have their own Internet websites in Chinese: Nam sprul 'Jigs med phun tshogs, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, O rgyan sKu gsum gling pa, and Bla ma rol ba'i rdo rje.[355]

Religion and spirituality on the Web is a new phenomenon that is emerging in multiple ways. As recent research in the field of Internet and spirituality has demonstrated, the combination of technology and religiosity, especially archaic forms of mystic teachings based on visionary experiences, is considerably transforming the world of religions contributing significantly to an unprecedented mobility of religion.[356] The apparent dichotomy between religious spirituality and the commercialization and international distribution offered by the Internet is starting to fade. Some forms of religious expression find in the modern technology new channels of information and communication. Spectacular graphic devices, digital photography, cyber-decorations, and immediate links to other Buddhism-related websites have created a large network of possibilities for those shopping for Buddhist centers and religious teachers. In this sense the Internet provides immediate application of its services by the user in his/her quest for data about Tibetan teachers, their visits, and even the most esoteric of Tantric

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[354] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terma_(Buddhism).

[355] Nam sprul 'Jigs med phun tshogs's website *Zangchuang fojiao dayuanman-nianlongsi* dedicated to his activities and his community can be found on-line at http://nianlongsi.net/. The *Yarchen uddiyana meditation monastery* at www.ycwjcl.com/index.asp is the Website dedicated to Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan and his activities at Ya chen sgar his religious encampment. O rgyan sKu gsum gling pa has multiple websites in various languages and for different audiences. The three richest and most elaborate websites dedicated to him and his communities are the English language *The Vajrakilaya Centers* at http://www.omura.com/k_lingpa/kilaya1.htm; the Chinese language website *Longensi-Wujin jingtu* www.longensi.com/index.hmtl; and the Portuguese at the Brazilian (Rio de Janeiro) website *Düdül Purpa Ling* at http://kilaya.dharmanet.com.br/brindex.htm. Bla ma rol ba'i rdo rje, a Treasure revealer living in Dar lag (Qinghai) also has a website at http://www.redj.com.cn/index_c.htm.

[356] See for instance the work of Apolito (2005) for a socio-anthropological study of Marian visionary movements on Internet. For some works on Internet and religion see "Internet and Religion" at the Hartford Institute for Religious Studies at http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/religion_web.html, and "Religion and the Internet" at the *MIT Communications Forum* at http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/forums/religion.html. See also Terrone (2009), for my own discussion on this topic from a paper on Treasure revealers on the Internet titled "Cyberspace Revelations: Tibetan Treasures, Information Technologies and the Transnational Imagined Reader" presented at the conference *Publishing and editing: the evolution and future of writing in Tibet* organized by the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research) - UMR 8155 "Centre de recherche sur les civilisations chinoise, japonaise et tibétaine", Paris May 29-31 2008.

Buddhist practices. The need for short readable news, which characterizes information offered on the Internet, has contributed to the formation of a variety of narrative strategies. Most websites of Tibetan Buddhist teachers are introduced by flashy descriptions of their spiritual qualities, high education, teaching skills, and also the major teachings they can offer to the devotees. The websites provide brief information about the Buddhist teacher's education and training. In many cases, however, the broad introduction tends to emphasize personal achievements, prodigious feats, and charismatic deeds, whereas they only occasionally emphasize the substance of his teachings.

In the following section we will look at how the Internet has been received and how it is used within the community of Treasure revealers focusing especially on O rgyan sKu gsum gling pa's websites, interpreting the use of the Internet in the larger theme of religion and technology.

## *Maṇḍala Spheres, Rainbow Lights, and Internet: A Case Study*

gTer chen O rgyan sKu gsum gling pa (henceforth sKu gsum gling pa, [1933-2009]) was a Buddhist teacher and a renowned Treasure revealer who has traveled extensively through China and America to give teachings at various Buddhist centers. Also known as Padma gtum po, sKu gsum gling pa was one of the most well-known Buddhist leaders and Treasure revealers in today's mGo log with many followers among Tibetans and Chinese. He is the founder of Thub bstan chos 'khor gling popularly known as Lung sngon sgar, one of the largest religious encampments (*chos sgar*) in eastern Tibet. Supported with the help of his American disciples and the assistance of his son Hung dkar rdo rje Rinpoche since 1995,[357] sKu gsum gling pa has established a network of eighteen Buddhist centers called the Vajrakilaya Centers, located predominantly in the San Francisco Bay area but also in Colorado, Oregon, and New York. Today sKu gsum gling pa's activities, travel schedules, and biographical stories together with some excerpts from his visionary teachings are accessible online at multiple websites that are mostly designed and maintained by his disciples.

sKu gsum gling pa was born in the male wood-dog year of 1933.[358] According to his biography, he began to reveal Treasure teachings at the age of sixteen and was recognized as the

[357] http://www.omura.com/k_lingpa/kilaya1.htm
[358] A bu dkar lo (2003: 63).

reincarnation of many outstanding teachers of the past.[359] His autobiographical writings report that he has been recognized as the reincarnation of eleven different figures including lHa lung dpal gyi rdo rje, the Indian *mahāsiddha* Dril bu ba, Rig 'dzin Nyi ma grags pa, sLob dpon dpa' bo, Yig mkhan ldan ma rtse mangs, and gTer ston du ma rgya zhang khrom rdo rje 'od 'bar.[360] Until recently, sKu gsum gling pa was one of the most popular, albeit controversial Buddhist teachers in eastern Tibet and is well-known for being a Treasure revealer. In his region he is appreciated as a contributor to the religious revitalization in eastern Tibet especially after the creation of his encampment Lung sngon sgar that began in 1986.[361] The encampment has grown exponentially since its early years and now comprises several religious buildings including two colleges (*grwa tshang*) dedicated to monastic and Tantric curricula.

Among the largest religious encampments in today's Tibet, sKu gsum gling pa's Lung sngon sgar hosts a resident monastic population of about thousand monastics, both monks and nuns, and a few hundreds lay residents from the surrounding areas.[362] Monks from neighboring monasteries including nearby Jo nang pa monastics frequently reside at Lung sngon sgar to

[359] Most of the information concerning sKu gsum gling pa was gathered during three visits to Lung sngon sgar (Thub bstan chos 'khor gling) in dGa' bde county (Qinghai). The first took place in October 2000 and I was then accompanied by gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan. My main informants at that time, and mostly later as well, were the monks 'Jigs med rdo rje, Chos bzang, and sKu gsum gling pa's son Hung dkar rdo rje all personal scribes of sKu gsum gling pa, whom I interviewed on various occasions. Further sources of information have been found on the Internet, at a number of websites, such as www.kilaya.org; www.omura/k_lingpa/kilaya1.html; http://geocities.yahoo.com.br/phurpal.ng/, and in Chinese at http://www.hungkar.com (now removed from the web) and www.longensi.org. Recently a biography in Tibetan language has been published in Hong Kong, *O rgyan sku gsum gling pa'i rnam thar*, 2003. Short and medium length biographical outlines in Portuguese have been uploaded on-line at the *Düdül Purpa Ling* website at http://www.kilaya.dharmanet.com.br/Biografias.htm.

[360] A bu dkar lo (2003: 45-59). Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje is the monk who, according to the tradition, assassinated king gLang Dar ma in 842. See for instance bDud 'joms (DJCB: f. 104b, p. 168). Dril bu pa (Skt. Ghaṇṭāpa) is recorded as one of the eighty-four Indian Buddhist realized beings (*mahāsiddhā*s). See Dowman (1986: 267-75). Rig 'dzin Nyi ma grags pa probably refers to Chags ri Nyi ma grags pa (1647-1710) born in the Nang chen gru ya phyag sbal kho rigs at Byams me. Among his many works, gTer ston Nyi ma grags pa is known for the revelations of Treasures such as the *Thugs rje chen po ma rig mun sel* in 1676, the *rTa mgrin dregs pa zil gnon* in 1682, and the *Phag mo skor bzhi* in 1686 among others. See also TBRC.

[361] A bu dkar lo (2003: 116-17).

[362] Lung sngon sgar is the name by which sKu gsum gling pa's retreat center, or mountain hermitage (*ri khrod*) is most popularly called. However, the formal name is Thub bstan chos skor gling, and other names include Thub bstan chos 'khor gling dgon pa and Lung sngon dgon. At first the compound consisted of a main temple, the Akanistha Temple gTsug lag khang sTug po bkod pa; the Meditation Hall, sKu gsum pho brang; the Assembly Hall, bDe chen pho brang, also known as rMa yul rig gnas pho brang; the Blab rang sham bha la; and the Assembly Hall of the Tantric college bDud 'dul gling. The encampment has now multiple large stupas but the largest and oldest one is the *Bya rung kha shor gnyis pa* (the "Second" Bya rung kha shor) a replica of the Boudhanath *stūpa* in Kathmandu. The construction of the large *stūpa* apparently began in 1996 and was completed in 1999. A short description of the *Bya rung kha shor gnyis pa stūpa* can be read online at http://www.omura.com/k_lingpa/stupa.html

pursue advanced Buddhist studies and to attend the colleges. During sKu gsum gling pa's public teachings and empowerment ceremonies the population reached thousands of participants.[363]

Despite sKu gsum gling pa's popularity as a Buddhist teacher, his claims to unique Treasure revelations did not make him immune to criticism from other Tibetan Buddhist teachers who question the authenticity of his revelations and the morality of his behavior. While traveling in areas of mGo log including 'Jig 'dril and Padma, I have occasionally encountered individuals whose comments about him were not supportive especially concerning the size of Lung sngon sgar. Many view sKu gsum gling pa's interest in finding resources to invest in his religious encampment detrimental to his activities as a religious teacher and especially as a spiritual guide for the local populace. In the past sKu gsum gling pa was criticized for his doubtful moral behavior, and the authenticity of his Treasures has been questioned.[364] These criticisms, as we have seen above, are not uncommon in Tibet, and sKu gsum gling pa, aware of such accusations, has discussed and refuted these charges in his autobiography.[365]

Since the growth of sKu gsum gling pa's popularity among Chinese and Western disciples alike, his activities and schedules, with all sorts of information related to his Treasure revelations and teachings, are publicized and disseminated on a number of websites dedicated to him.[366] Although both American and Chinese websites focus on the same teacher, sKu gsum gling pa, they have been structured and organized differently from each other. The American Kilaya website focuses more on commercial features with an emphasis on religious items and products on sale for devotees such as *thang ka* scrolls and Treasure vases to "to help support His Holiness Orgyen Kusum Lingpa's efforts here in the United States."[367] The Kilaya website also attempts to represent the message of the teacher by emphasizing his Treasure revelations as a product of his wisdom as "a pre-eminent Dzogchen teacher and Nyingma lineage holder" thus focusing on his teachings, their content, and the importance of receiving them.[368] The Kilaya website's presentation thus underlines qualifications of sKu gsum gling pa such as being the

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[363] Chos bzang's oral communication. dGa' bde (Qinghai, PRC) October 2000.
[364] Germano (1998: 72).
[365] See Germano (1998: 70-71). The issue is discussed extensively in different sections of his autobiography written by A bu dkar lo (2003) in collaboration with Hung dkar rdo rje, but especially in Chapter Six (74-101), where sKu gsum gling pa and his son Hung dkar refute the accusations about sKu gsum gling pa's teachings being false Treasures (*gter rdzun*). For my discussion of this see above in this Chapter.
[366] At the time of writing this dissertation the *Kilaya.org* website provided a list of 18 actual states in North America where Vajrakilaya Centers associated with sKu gsum gling pa have been established. For a list of the centers see the website of the Vajrakilaya Centers at www.omura.com/k_lingpa/Dir2.htm.
[367] http://www.omura.com/k_lingpa/artshrine.html.
[368] http://www.omura.com/k_lingpa/Klingpa2.html.

lineage holder of the *rdzogs chen snying thig* system, although nothing is said about the teachings he received and the influential teachers with whom he studied during his career. Nevertheless, the website calls attention to sKu gsum gling pa's direct claim to be a Treasure revealer:

> His Holiness Orgyen Kusum Lingpa is a pre-eminent Dzogs chen teacher and Nyingma lineage holder. He is known as one of the greatest living tertons (treasure revealers) in the world today, having revealed the 3 classes of terma; those received directly from the mind, "crazy" termas can manifest in the yogi as unconventional behavior, and secret termas which can only be revealed by one who is the owner of all 18 families of terma. His Holiness has been recognized as the incarnation of the Mahasiddha Drilbupa and of Lha-lun Pelgyi Dorje. His title, Kusum Lingpa means "Treasure Revealer of the Three Kayas.[369]

sKu gsum gling pa's Chinese websites, in contrast, provide signs of the teacher's miraculous powers, thus emphasizing the magical or supernatural features of the teacher's persona. At *hungkar.com* the use of modern technology, such as digital photography, combines the religious substance of the Buddhist message of the master's teachings with the supposedly supernatural phenomena that are believed to often take place during major events, such as empowerments and teachings in the encampment where he lives.[370] The Chinese website *hungkar.com* was the first official website of Lung sngon sgar (Ch. longensi) and beside the possibility of downloading pictures of sKu gsum gling pa and of his son Hung dkar rdo rje, brief biographical information about the teachers, and the latest news about empowerments and major events at the encampment, the Chinese Internet reader can also purchase several religious items online including *thang ka* scroll paintings, prayer wheels, and books.

Interestingly, the short biographical outline also states that sKu gsum gling pa has revealed two Treasure texts while in the US:

> In Tibetan His Holiness is called a terton or treasure finder. Padmasambhava, the 9th century adept who helped found Buddhism in Tibet, hid sacred texts and other objects in the earth, water and sky in order that future generations might have teachings and practices appropriate to their era and circumstances. At the appropriate time, these 'treasures' would be revealed by treasure finders who were emanations of

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[369] http://www.omura.com/k_lingpa/Klingpa2.html.

[370] This website is not currently open and accessible on-line anymore. The material discussed in this section refers to what I had access to until March 2007. Some of the information I quote in this sections were nevertheless obtained later in their "cached" form from Google.com. The current website in Chinese that has replaced hungkar.com is www.longensi.org.

> his closest disciples. In this way the scriptural tradition is refreshed and updated across history. His Holiness has revealed over fifty volumes of such texts. At least two texts were discovered in the U.S.[371]

The biographical text places particular emphasis not only on sKu gsum gling pa's visionary virtuosity, but also on his charismatic healing powers:

> From an early age His Holiness showed remarkable understanding of complex rituals and sacred texts. He has had many visions -- face to face encounters -- with such enlightened beings as Padmasambhava and the bodhisattva Vajrapani. Over his lifetime he has studied with over 150 great masters of the tradition without sectarian bias and has received instruction from all the major schools of Tibetan Buddhist meditation. […] His Holiness is also widely known as a healer whose activity has brought physical and spiritual restoration to tens of thousands.[372]

The *omura.org* website dedicated to sKu gsum gling pa provides also a short description of a number of his teachings and empowerments that practitioners can receive during the retreats offered at the Kilaya meetings. Most of them are described as Treasure teachings by other previous Treasure revealers and include the *Kar Ling Shi Tro* (*Kar gling zhi khro*) and *Vajrakilaya Empowerment.* Other teachings are sKu gsum gling pa's own revealed Treasure such as the *Gesar of Ling Empowerment*, the *Shambala Terma*, the *Pema Nying-Thig* (*Padma snying thig*), the *Acharya Pema*, and the *Shib-chay Chöd* (*Zhib cha'i gcod*).[373]

The study of the Chinese *hongkar.org* website offers a more phenomenological approach to religion as, in addition to various prayers, compositions, and short teachings by sKu gsum gling pa, it also offers photos of magical events during the performance of religious activities at Lung sngon sgar. Such a series of features enhance the sacrality of the religious site and the magical phenomena that take place there in connection with the presence of sKu gsum gling pa and his spiritual activities. This is particularly remarkable, in my opinion, considering on the one hand the Chinese government's refusal to permit a free flow of information on the Internet, and on the other that the belief in and dissemination of supernatural phenomena associated with religion and religious personalities enjoy little sympathy among Chinese leaders.[374] When active, the website displayed an entire array of photos of auspicious divine halos (Ch. *lingguang*), rainbows (Ch. *caihong*), and of particular arrangements of banks of clouds above the Lung sngon

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[371] http://www.newagemusiconline.com/bio.html.
[372] http://www.newagemusiconline.com/bio.html.
[373] For a list of teachings given by sKu gsum gling pa during his American tours, please see http://www.omura.com/k_lingpa/Klingpa2.htm.
[374] See Franda (2002: 191-203).

sgar encampment, and showed photos of "maṇḍala snow flakes" (Ch. *mantuoluo xue*) or "maṇḍala spheres" (Ch. *mantuoluo bao*) occupying the inner space of the assembly hall during the prayer sessions at the second Shambala Great World Peace Aspiration Prayer Festival.[375] A link at the bottom of the portal opened a window where guest browsers could post questions at *Lung sngon Monastery Website – Shambala Area – Comments and Suggestions*. In a window titled "A Conversation on the Mandala snow flakes" the meaning of the phenomenon was explained as if taking place between a young girl Xiao Xia and a cartoon Japanese *manga* character called Yanzi:

> Xiao Xia: What are the mandala snow flakes?
> Yanzi: The mandala is a cosmic world. During this Dharma assembly in the space around us innumerable cosmic worlds have appeared and manifested just like snow. That's why we call them 'mandala snow flakes.'
> Xiao Xia: Do you know what a cosmic world is?
> Yanzi: Of course it is a Buddhist world formed by a hosting Buddha and an entourage of Bodhisattvas. Please enjoy the shambala mandala thang ka pictures at http://www.hungkar.com/2005_xiangbala/mandala/index.htm. […][376]

Through the use of Internet technology such as the above examples, the dissemination of Buddhism has reached a new phase. sKu gsum gling pa and his webmasters have created a platform on which the performance of new activities can take place for devotees and occasional curious browsers alike. The immense infrastructure provided by the Internet encourages such experiments in faith and the communication of cultural phenomena, like visionary experiences and supernatural apparitions, to users more inclined to appreciate digitally produced images and quick verbal or written references. This creates and reaffirms sacrality, or the sphere of profound respect and veneration for the divine or spiritual wisdom, through the awe-inspiring images of supernatural phenomena, the display of prayers, religious items, and the communication of personal experiences, so important for the practitioner's devotion and sense of belonging to a religious community. All these are in various degrees were crucial for the sKu gsum gling pa and others as it enhanced the supernatural quality of their activities so much appreciated, apparently, by online Chinese communities today.

More needs to be done to appreciate in greater depth the impact of Internet technology on the dissemination of religious practice and the production of religious culture in Tibet and

[375] www.hungkar.com/2005_xiangbala/ruixiang/index1.htm. www.hungkar.com/2005_xiangbala/yanjiu/index2.htm. www.hungkar.com/2005_xiangbala/caihong/index3.htm.
[376] http://www.hungkar.com/gbook/index.asp?user=mandala. The translation is mine.

China. However, my preliminary study of the phenomenon specifically concerned with Treasure revealers' presence on the Web encourages a few observations. It is my sense that while the larger underlying message conveyed by the websites, both American and Chinese, focuses on the figure of sKu gsum gling pa as a Treasure revealer, the two narratives of his life story and his religious education capitalize on different discourses. The American audience seems to be more sensitive to an historical and religious content. In this regard, the biographical outlines online put greater emphasis on history, content of the teachings received and revealed, and their significance in the large scheme of Buddhism soteriological practices. Looking at the Chinese website instead, it emphasizes more the supernatural elements of the master's mystical realization. This can be demonstrated especially by the high number of references to sKu gsum gling pa's miraculous deeds in Tibet that are mentioned in the biographical writings on the website. In addition, the use of digital photography seems particularly useful if we consider that the website is generous with photos of halos, rainbows, "maṇḍala spheres," and Treasure caskets revealed by sKu gsum gling pa that serve to foster the believer's faith in the supermundane nature of his religious charisma.

## *Concluding Remarks*

With few exceptions, the religious professionals who perform Treasure revelations in eastern Tibet today represent the class of non-celibate Tantric figures (*sngags pa*). As shown through the example of bKra shis rgyal mtshan, while the prestige of being a Treasure revealer is primarily achieved via recognition of spiritual attributes by a high Buddhist specialist, it is also acquired with training and experience. Only education and instruction under an experienced legitimate teacher, the identification and interpretation of auspicious events, and the fulfillment of visions and aspirations together with legitimate Treasure scriptures can validate a Treasure revealer.

Although dedicated to the pursuit of spiritual liberation and the performance of merit making activities, Treasure revealers as Tantric professionals also fill other more pragmatic roles for the communities with which they interact. Just as in other religious traditions, religion and economics are mutually supporting. bKra shis rgyal mtshan and dPal chen lha mo combine their religious skills and specialties in the service of the community in two ways. On the one hand bKra shis rgyal mtshan aided by dpal chen lha mo fulfill the allegedly century-old prophecy of

*gter ma* revelations by excavating hidden sacred objects and doctrinal scriptures that provide them with prestige and sacrality. On the other hand, dPal chen lha mo aided by bKra shis rgyal mtshan specialize in divination and clairvoyance thus providing pragmatic services for the community concerning health and prosperity. In this way, the religious couple provides spiritual support to the laity while the community offers financial sustainment and supplies to their religious specialists.

With modernization, increased mobility, larger groups of followers including Chinese devotees, and the introduction of new communication technologies, the practice and teaching of religion, and popularity of Buddhist teachers and Treasure revealers has reached a new level. Treasure revealers are becoming more prominent in their devotees' lives, promoting their image and themselves as models to their followers. In such a new scenario, the question of moral behavior and correct conduct for non-celibate religious leaders has attracted the interest of some religious leaders who believe that more attention must be paid to proper behavior to maintain pure Buddhist ethics. On the one hand mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs is especially concerned about the improper use of consorts for spiritual practices and realization. He considered sexual practices as one of the many adulterations of esoteric practices that threaten the purity of Buddhism in Tibet when performed by unqualified visionaries. At the other extreme, non-celibate Treasure revealers do not agree with such reprimand and support the Tibetan traditional groups of Tantric professionals and their unconventional behavior. bKra shis rgyal mtshan explicitly emphasizes that the use of one or multiple prophesied consorts not only is appropriate for Tantric practices, but performed appropriately can increase a visionary's revelation activities.

The significant number of active Treasure revealers in present-day eastern Tibet shows that some Tibetan Buddhist leaders are aware of the power that Treasure doctrines have in recreating a mytho-historical connection with a glorious past and with powerful religious symbols. With its emphasis on the supernatural elements of Buddhist achievements and a strong tendency to employ elements of traditional and popular culture, Treasure revelation targets those devotees who are sensitive to the charm of charisma and the power of devotion.

One example is sKu gsum gling pa and his endeavors to reach out to not only Tibetan devotees but also and more specifically to Western and Chinese Buddhist followers. With the use of two different communication channels, one in English for his American devotees and one in Chinese for his Chinese Buddhist followers in the PRC, he emphasizes different aspects of his personality and his powers to appeal to devotees. Such an approach seems to be particularly

successful thanks to the use of the Internet that allows the use of text, photos, and videos on one single communicative platform accessible by anyone, anywhere, and at any time.

# Chapter Four: Bya rog prog zhu: The Raven Crest



## *bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and his Tradition*

The previous three chapters have offered an overview of the historical, social, and religious realms of present-day’s Treasure revealers. This chapter offers an inquiry into the life and activities of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, who at eighty-seven is now, probably, one of the oldest Treasure revealers in present-day Tibet. The study of his life offers the opportunity to appreciate key issues in a person’s role as visionary and Treasure revealer in his community.

An examination of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s lifestyle and religious activities can offer a way to understand the role Buddhism plays in twenty-first-century Tibet and the place that non-celibate Tantric professionals have within the religious community. The study of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life offers a glimpse into how ritual acts, contemplations, imagery, and the interactions with religious leaders contribute to the formation of a religious figure’s personality and identity in the world of Tibetan Buddhism and Treasure revelation.

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje is not a monk, but rather a non-celibate Tantric specialist (*sngags pa*) and visionary virtuoso, a role that in traditional Tibet formed a breed of rather unconventional religious personalities. Symbolically identified by the predominant white color of their robes (*gos dkar*) and the long braided locks of hair (*dbu skra ral pa*) that represent noncelibacy, such a group of Tantric practitioners is often referred to in the literature as the white-clad and long-haired order (*gos dkar lcang lo’i sde*).[377] They tendend to pursue a path characterized by independent thinking, an often unconventional non-celibate lifestyle, and a commitment to meditation retreats (*mtshams*) and Tantric practices as opposed to the scholastic study and philosophical debate typical of the monastic path. Rather than being affiliated with monasteries, these Buddhist practitioners tend primarily to live the life of the householder with families and children, and often gather a following of devotees and practitioners around them.

[377] TM (f. 5b).

This study is the result of a ten-year project begun in the summer of 1998 when I first met bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje at his residence the gNas chen padma mthong grol mountain hermitage on Mount gNas chen pad ma near Nang chen in Yushu TAP. As explained in the introduction, I first arrived at the mountain hermitage accompanied by Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che, a young incarnated master (*sprul sku*) and one of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s disciples, whom I met the year before in Lhasa. Since then I have visited bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and his community regularly almost every year, and often multiple times a year studying his material and his life through conversations and interviews with him and members of his community, and through the study of his literary production and autobiographical writings. In the past decade I have met bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje at various locations in Khams as he would journey through the region on invitation to give teachings and instructions to nuns and monks from several religious centers. Therefore, I have had the opportunity to observe the “elder master” (*bla rgan*), as most of his followers refer to him, engage with different monastic communities under various circumstances. A number of people have been particularly helpful in my study and understanding of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life and activities including bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his consort mKha’ ’gro dPal chen lha mo, Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che, and the nun bKra shis mtsho mo, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s assistant and scribe. The life depicted in this chapter is thus the result of ethnographic and textual research.

According to his autobiographical writings, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje (b. 1921) was very young when he decided to renounce worldly life and embrace the life of a wandering Tantric practitioner. Such a course of life was not unusual although not the most common in a country like Tibet where monasticism was the most favored religious path and many young people would become monks (or nuns) as children either spontaneously or more frequently following their parents’ will.[378] His travels brought him in contact with local lamas and were interspersed by solitary peregrinations where he developed a predisposition for contemplation and meditation rather than the doctrinal studies found within scholastic monasticism. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje chose a solitary life making frequent pilgrimages. Unconcerned with monasticism and doctrinal systematization, he chose a largely autodidactic education characterized by an eclectic religious approach, including intense discipline and a rejection of main-stream social conventions. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje is a yogi *par excellence* animated by a rich religious experiential

[378] Kapstein (2006: 220).

background and mystic fervor, which he generously illustrates in his writings. Taking his lead from iconic Buddhist meditators such as the eleventh-century saint Mi la ras pa and the eighteenth-century yogi Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, both influential models that occur in his writings, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s Buddhism is characterized by intense dedication and practice and a sincere commitment to his root teachers’ (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*) instructions.[379] However, behind such a discourse, which brings literary underpinnings to light, the study of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life demonstrates those elements that are key to the formation of a visionary’s identity and his social function.

Despite his conscious adherence to the rNying ma tradition, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s personal curriculum is rather ecumenical and multi-disciplinary, but nevertheless strictly focused on experience and practice. He received transmissions, empowerments, and instructions from some of the major religious personalities of his time. However, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s education was shaped by following primarily rNying ma and bKa’ brgyud doctrinal material. If there was any lack of traditional scriptural learning in his education, it was counterbalanced by personal experience and insights gained through liturgical and contemplation-oriented practices. Additionally, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s Treasure scriptural production (*gter chos*) covers a vast range of ritual and instruction material. Specifically, some of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s textual revelations, such as the *rTsol med*, are addressed to the specific non-celibate community of Tantric practitioners, the *gos dkar lcang lo’i sde*.[380]

### *The Autobiography: rnam thar or rang rnam?*

Although bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje is one of a number of active and elderly non-celibate Buddhist teachers and Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) in Tibet today, it should come as no surprise that only in the very last part of his life has he committed to writing an autobiographical account of his life.[381]In order to make sense, an autobiography needs to be written when the author has the perception that he not only *has* something to say, but also that he is at a certain point in his life when he *knows* this can be useful to the community he lives in.

[379] DGSM (f. 13a).

[380] See Chapter Five for my discussion on bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s Treasure cycles and the *rTsol med*.

[381] For general studies in religious biographies in Asia and Tibet see Granoff and Shinohara (1988) and Penny (2002), among others. For a specific study of early Tibetan *gter ston* see Prats (1982), Gyatso (1998), and Martin (2002).

If we consider that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje has written an autobiography in his late seventies at the climax of his popularity we can appreciate why, despite his impressive literary production covering hundreds of revealed teachings and ritual works, he did not show interest in writing his autobiography earlier in his life. It was only in the summer of 1998 that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje wrote a series of short autobiographical writings, while residing at his gNas chen padma mthong grol, one of his mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) located on Mount gNas chen padma.

In August 1997, he wrote *The Dance of the Pure Vajra: A Brief Biography of the Awareness-holder Nus ldan rdo rje* (*Rig ’dzin nus ldan rdo rje’i rnam thar bsdus pa dri med rdo rje’i zlos gar*, henceforth DDZG).[382] bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje dictated the story of his life to his consort bKra shis mtsho mo, who also plays the important role of scribe (*yi ge pa*) for his written teachings.[383] The title of the DDZG designates it as a biography (*rnam thar*), but strictly speaking it is an autobiography (*rang rnam*). Following recent theorists of autobiographical writing, such as Philippe Lejeune, for instance, proof that the DDZG is indeed an autobiography is shown by the fact that is written entirely in the firstperson, and that the trio *author*, *narrator* and *protagonist* of the manuscript are the same person.[384] Lejeune’s statement and similar contemporary discourses on the nature of the autobiographical self are beyond the scope of the present study.[385] It is worth noting, however, that Tibetan autobiography, just as Western autobiography, highlights particular aspects of the author’s personality, i.e., his individuality and the representation of his “self.” The dynamics of self-representation and self-figuration in a Tibetan autobiographical text can display an array of conflicting ideologies such as the attempt to internalize theories of impermanence and selflessness, or the nonexistence of the individual at

[382] Nus ldan rdo rje is one of many epithets of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. The DDZG was handwritten in Tibetan *dbu med* script. The dimensions of each page measure 5.0 cm x 44.0 cm and the total number of *folia* is eleven. The format of this unpublished manuscript follows the traditional Tibetan loose-sheet unbound books (*dpe cha*). Two original handwritten copies of the manuscript are in existence. One is in my possession; the other is with bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje.

[383] The role of *yi ge pa*, as we shall see below, has been performed by various trusted disciples close to bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje in the past. Even nowadays, although bKra shis mtsho mo is the current and most regular scribe, other people occasionally write down bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s teachings, such as rDo rje bkra shis and bKra shis rgyal mtshan.

[384] Although rare, there are cases of autobiographical accounts in Western literature written in the second or third person, but I am not familiar with any of them within the Tibetan literary world. However, autobiographies are still assumed to be marked by the use of the first person. See Lejeune (1989: 5).

[385] Gyatso provides an insightful analysis of the “I” and the involvement of the “self” in Tibetan religious autobiography. See Gyatso (1998: 101-16).

the absolute level, on the one hand, and the impulse to provide a self-aggrandizing and positive portrait of the protagonist/author of the story on the other.[386]

Aside from the DDZG, an additional source of biographical information for the study of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life is a minor and short autobiographical sketch, which he produced in 1999. The *bDe chen rdo rje’i rnam thar phran bu* (*Short Biography of bDe chen rdo rje,* henceforth NTPB) has been dictated by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and was written down by bKra shis mtsho mo directly on my fieldwork notebook during one of my interviews with the old master. As in the case of the previous biography, here too bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje quotes my name and refers to my request in order to explain the reason for the composition of the autobiographical outline.[387]

The two life stories narrate the events chronologically. However, specific historical dates are rare. The two texts are simple and condensed in their description of the events narrated. The historical significance of a text such as the DDZG is limited to the names of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s main tutors and those religious personalities and teachers whom he met during his travels and pilgrimages. The autobiographical text represents the core of Tibetan hagiographic literature and covers the major phases of a religious figure’s life, in this case a Treasure revealer’s life: a spectacular birth, an early encounter with the sacred, pilgrimage, meeting with masters, teachings received (*thob yig*, *gsan yig*), meditation and practice, prophecies, and revelation. The autobiographical text as a life story of a saint is replete with supernatural elements recurring in most hagiographies. However, it is also rich in the author’s personal observations and thoughts about how Tantric professionals and visionaries are perceived in their society. Additionally, Treasure revealers’ autobiographies are also characterized by more visions and dreams than other biographies and, therefore, are particularly important for the student of

[386] Studies of Tibetan autobiographies and biographies from a literary-theoretical point of view are still rare in the academic world. However, Gyatso (1998, 1992a) has already provided an interesting framework for such an approach. See also Jacoby (2007); Schaeffer (2004); and Havnevik (1999).

[387] “The Teacher Śākya[muni] said: ‘All flesh and bones together equal the size of mount Meru. Matter and blood could be as large as the ocean. But the accumulation of meritorious deeds is inconceivable and inexpressible.’ This brief comment explains that actions associated with past and later actions do exist and are inexpressible in quantity and human beings go beyond their own sphere of activity. Actually, since a foreigner, Antonio, has traveled thousands of kilometers, encountering many hardships and fatigue, I will not oppose to [his] assiduous requests and concede a brief outline of my story.” Text 1, NTPB (1999, line 9). The first few lines above are inspired by a famous verse from Zhabs dkar’s autobiography: “If one were to pile up all the flesh and bone of all the bodies you’ve once had and left, they would make a heap higher than Mount Meru; there would be as many as all the particles of dust on the entire earth.” See Ricard (1994: 194).

hagiographies. In this sense, the reading of such a text provides valuable additional means for an ethnography of Tibetan visionaries and Treasure revealers.

An important point to keep in mind while reading a Buddhist autobiography such as DDZG, is that sacred lifestories in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition are expected to describe the life of a person who has achieved liberation.[388] The term, as we have briefly seen, contains this essential point since *rnam* [*par*] *thar* [*pa*], one of the most common Tibetan terms for "biography," literally translates "[story of] complete liberation."[389] Keeping this in mind could facilitate the understanding of how this peculiar form of biography can easily bear clear elements that are modeled after previous forms of religious and sacred biographies.

In this regard Giuseppe Tucci observes that,

> In a literature founded on imitation, like that of Tibet, it is not surprising that these compositions should have taken shape with the conscious purpose of continuing in the Country of Snows a literary *genre* largely cultivated by Buddhists and known as Avadāna or Jātaka. [...] Hence these biographies are called not only *rnam t'ar* but also *mṅon rtogs,* which is the regular translation for Avadāna; sometimes they are also called *skyes rabs*, Jātaka, because the saint's life is followed in his past incarnations. The difference between Indian Avadāna and these *rnam t'ar* is immediately recognizable: the former relate a particular fact; the latter follow a person's life from birth to death. But in their composition these *rnam t'ar* imitate above all the Buddha's most celebrated lives.[390]

Despite the dynamism that Tibetan autobiographies convey in these life-stories, ultimately most, if not all Buddhist biographies are modeled after the traditional biographical accounts of Gautama Buddha.[391] Historical facts are interspersed with supernatural elements in such a way that the borders between the one and the other are often blurred. Due to the frequent Tibetan inattention to historical evidence and details, the paradigms of the religious architecture of Buddhist life stories are immediately evident in Tibetan biographies and autobiographies. Miraculous birth, auspicious signs at the time of conception, early generation of a sense of renunciation, dramatic departure from family and community, asceticism and a series of

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[388] Gyatso (1998: 103); Havnevik (1999: 36); Schaeffer (2004: 5-6). Tucci (1949: 150) writes: "*rNam t'ar* much resemble the lives of saints widely circulated during our Middle Ages; they must be considered neither histories nor chronicles. The events they relate with particular satisfaction are spiritual conquests, visions and ecstasies; they follow the long apprenticeship through which man becomes divine, they give lists of the texts upon which trained and disciplined their minds, for each lama they record the masters who opened up his spirit to serene visions, or caused ambrosia of supreme revelations to rain down upon him."

[389] Another specific term - although wider in meaning - often used in Tibetan treatises associated with hagiographies is *rtogs brjod* (Skt. *avadāna*) or "expression of realization". See Gyatso (1998: 6). Tucci includes in the list of possible terms for biography also *mngon rtogs* (realization; Skt. *abhisamaya*), which also suggests the protagonist's liberated state, and *skyes rabs* (history of previous lives; Skt. *jātaka*). See Tucci (1949: 151).

[390] Tucci (1949: 151).

[391] Gyatso (1998: 111).

encounters with teachers and realized beings, and the acquisition of a series of supernatural powers, are among the most common elements paradigmatically provided in major Buddhist life stories.[392]

Also, in the DDZG where the life story has been dictated by the protagonist himself, these normative features are evidently cooperating in the construction of a structure of the sacred emphasized by the accumulation of Buddhist virtues and merits. As in most Tibetan Buddhist autobiographies,[393] the DDZG is generous in descriptions of pilgrimages, sacred sites, visits to masters, teachings received, meditations, visions, and signs of realizations. Through this, it offers an image of the protagonist as an exceptional and virtuous human being. It is especially the sacred space (*gnas*) and the rituals associated with it such as pilgrimage (*gnas skor*) that take on a major role as the *locus* of important practice and personal edification in autobiographies of this kind. As Tucci has pointed out, *gnas* and *gnas skor* occur regularly in Tibetan *rnam thar*, and their role in a pious person's life story is one of the normative traits of every religious specialist either monastic or non-celibate.[394]

Autobiographies in Tibet are often written on request of personal students or disciples of the authors. The religious person would likely accept the task aware of the benefits that his written account of life and experiences would generate to his pupils' lives as practitioners and to his own reputation. The audience is wide and varied. The monastic or religious community is not necessarily the only audience for which a sacred autobiography or biography is written. The life story may be filled with detailed descriptions of sacred landscapes and sophisticated teachings, but ultimately, in its general design the autobiography is accessible and meant to be read by

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[392] Lamotte (1958); Templeman (2002: 132-147); Silk (2003: 863-881).

[393] Havnevik (1999: 36).

[394] "Further, Tibet has in common with India the urge to accomplish pilgrimages to sacred spots; the *Tirthayātrā*, which is in India a duty for pious persons, has its Tibetan counterpart, the *gnas skor*. From lamas to merchants, from noblemen to leaders of caravans, there is nobody but has visited the famous places of religious tradition; neither, do they think there is a corner of the earth unhallowed by the divine presence, in its three aspects: physical, verbal and spiritual (*sku, gsuṅs*, *t'ugs*). Tibetan soil is like a material container into which the vicissitudes of the Law unfold; it receives the masters' relics, it harbours on the inviolate peaks of its mountains mysterious powers; it feeds, in temples built by man, the lamp of doctrine; it conceals in its inmost recesses the books hidden by ancient seers, that they might enlighten future generations. Buddhism has imagined the revelation of truth as a thunderbolt, flashing from one point to another amid the darkness of māyā; those who have had the good fortune to be born as men, should not loose any occasion of purifying their spirit, they should not neglect any contact capable of making them sensitive to the voice of truth and thus more consciously preparing them for supreme renouncement. Hence visits to sacred places are a necessary discipline, an edification of the spirit which cuts men off from life's allurements. Precisely for this reason the *rnam t'ar* dwell on pilgrimages performed by saints in their earthly life, and often contain real itineraries, which are very important for the reconstruction of Tibet's historical geography, and to ascertain which places were most popular in different epochs, thus gaining an idea of the sects' insecure fortunes." Tucci (1949: 152-53).

everyone interested in a religious practitioner's life and attainments. However, it is true that a distinction in Tibetan autobiographical literature must be made between a "general biography" or "external biography" (*spyi'i rnam thar*) and more specific and often intimate forms of life stories. The latter is a class of writings intimately associated with personal development and realization through practice and can be divided into two different, although related, categories: the *nang ba'i rnam thar*, "personal biography," literally "inner biography" (or *nang ba'i rang rnam* in the case of an autobiography), which usually provides a description or list of the teachings received (*thob yig* or *gsan yig*) and the masters visited by the protagonist during his life time; and a *gsang ba'i rnam thar*, a "secret biography" (or *gsang ba'i rang rnam*). This last form of writing is a complex account containing personal considerations, inner contemplations, perceptions of signs of realizations, list and descriptions of visions and dreams, and often songs of experience (*nyams mgur*) that can be found also in the form of a diary or journal (*nyin theb*).[395] These last two genres are more esoteric forms of writings which therefore used to require a disciple to be an advanced personal student in order to receive them.[396] Despite the highly condensed form of his autobiography (*rnam thar bsdus pa*), what bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has produced is actually a sort of tripartite autobiography where elements of all three levels of autobiographical discourse typical of Tibetan Buddhist life-writing (outer, inner, and secret) are present and recognizable. In his autobiography the author presents a selection of his innermost thoughts regarding his experiences while considering the crucial events that characterized his life and spiritual development. These thoughts and considerations reflect on situations that correspond to the outer level (*spyi*) of life experience (childhood and separation from his family household); inner (*nang*) process of religious training (renunciation, pilgrimage, religious study, and teachings from masters); and secret (*gsang*) discourses emerging from his gradual spiritual development (contemplations, meditations, visions, and revelations).

The secret biography is, therefore, a unique form of life story that contains the personal and inner experiences of a practitioner's religious activity. It is often in the secret biography that the saint or religious personality's innermost reflections on practice are reported. Secret biographies, often autobiographies, are forms of recording personal experiences and insights into meditation practices, achievements, observations and doubts, records of significant visions and dreams, and comments on religious matters. In bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's DDGZ many of these

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[395] Gyatso (1998: 103).
[396] Tucci (1949: 150-53); Gyatso (1998: 101-24); Havnevik (1999: 27-54).

discursive elements are represented with vivid description and emphasis. The DDZG is thus at the same time a general, an inner, and a secret autobiography meant to produce in the reader's mind an essential image of the author as close to him as possible beginning from the construction of a personality (a young renunciant) and ending (although not dying) with the establishment of an identity (that of a Treasure revealer).

Although personal students and devotees are the predominant audience for whom Tibetan sacred autobiographies are written, religious personalities' life-stories are widely read all over Tibet. In the case of the DDZG, despite the fact that the autobiography was specifically composed on a foreigner's request for the purpose of studying bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life and having a written account of his life experiences, the manuscript has been circulating among a number of Buddhist communities in Nang chen and sKye rgu mdo area. Indeed, in addition to these motives, behind the composition of an autobiography there are also more mundane and material reasons, as Hanna Havnevik has highlighted, such as "sectarian competition, the ambition for secular and religious power, and control over land and material resources."[397]

## *The Scribe: bKra shis mtsho mo*

A few words need to be said about the actual scribe of the text. bKra shis mtsho mo is the writer of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's autobiographies and most of his Treasure scriptures, as well as of many other recent works. bKra shis mtsho mo is a young nun who serves as his assistant and scribe, and lives with bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje in Nang chen. bKra shis mtsho mo was born in 1970 to a nomad family in the Zur mang area of Nang chen (Yushu TAP). She has been at bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's side for almost half of her life and has worked as his private scribe for the last ten years. She studied in a Chinese school up to her secondary school in sKye rgu mdo, receiving a good scholastic education. She has a mastery of Tibetan scripts.

During my years at bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's residence, bKra shis mtsho mo told me that her mother was one of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's most fervent devotees.[398] Apparently she was killed by the Red Guards some time during the last years of the Cultural Revolution. After the death of her mother, bKra shis mtsho mo's father sent her to school in sKye rgu mdo town where

[397] Havnevik (1999: 37).

[398] Her name was Chos dbyings sgrol ma; however I was unable to confirm this information and gather more data about her life.

she studied for a few years at a local middle school. When she was nineteen years old, however, she decided to follow her religious vocation and left to become a novice nun under bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje in the mid-1980s. bKra shis mtsho mo’s role as personal attendant and scribe of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje makes her the closest person in constant contact with the old teacher and his activities. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje has never personally written his texts but he has always used a scribe. On many occasions he has derided his own handwriting.

Several people have served as personal scribes for his manuscripts. The first to attend bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje as a scribe to his revealed texts was ’Jigs med seng ge (d. 2004), monk and physician at the dGa’ ldan monastery in the Zur mang area (rTsi zur mang dga’ ldan thub bstan nges legs gling). ’O spug tshe ring, a lay person from mGo rjo in sKye rgu mdo county, served the longest period of time as a scribe, working in bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s service for more than fifteen years until the late 1980s. Occasionally rDo rje bkra shis, a monk who is now leading the mountain retreat rDzings rgyal on Mount gNas chen padma served bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje as a scribe. gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan, a close disciple of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, has also written a few of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s revealed scriptures.

Despite bKra shis mtsho mo’s writing skills and elegant calligraphy, the DDZG, as in the case of other texts she has transcribed, is frequently marked with inaccuracies and orthographic errors.[399] bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s vernacular style characterizes most of his literary production and reflects his personal formulaic claims of modesty and ignorance. Nevertheless, his autobiography, as in the case of other writings, is often interspersed with poetic locutions, which echo his knowledge of classical Tibetan literature.

## *Early Visions: the Announcement of a Treasure Revealer’s Career*

It is clear that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s writing style reflects an overtly self-conscious understanding of his precise role in the contemporary Tibetan Buddhist world. As in the case of most Tibetan autobiographies, his writings are carefully structured to provide a concise yet explicit elevation of himself and of his personal mission promoting those elements that relate to his announced career as a visionary and Treasure revealer. In line with an established Buddhist

[399] Typical mistakes are, for instance, *pa’i* for *pas*, *rgyud* for *brgyud*, *bka’* for *dka’*, *sgra* for *gra* or *dra*, and *gdengs-’dzub* for *sdigs-mdzub*. Like many Tibetan manuscripts this text too is interspersed with orthographic contractions (*bsdus yig*). The most common contractions in the text are *rdoe* for *rdo-rje*, *gsngags* for *gsang-sngags*, *mkhro* for *mkha’-’gro*, and also *yumb* for *yab-yum*, *yees* for *ye-shes*, *thamd* for *thams-cad*, and *rbyams* for *rab-’byams*.

tradition of lifestory writing in Tibet, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje places the early part of his autobiography far from the settings of his family and, as we shall see below, he immediately emphasizes aspects of his renunciation, visionary signs, prophetic dreams, and meetings with religious teachers. The story of his life is told simply, yet it stresses the dramatic events he experienced in his youth. In this sense, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s autobiographical writings convey the idea that the role he plays is in agreement with the karmic order according to which the arcane prophecy that he is the reincarnation of dPal kyi seng ge, one of Padmasambhava’s twenty-five disciples (*rje ’bangs nyer lnga*), is finally fulfilled.

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje was born in 1921, or the Iron-Bird year, according to the Tibetan lunar calendar. At birth he was given the name ’Jigs med tshe ring. He was the son of a modest nomad family living in the highlands of Chos gling lha ru, a small semi-nomadic community in a vast pasture land southwest of sKye rgu mdo town in present-day Yushu county (Yushu TAP). As is typical of hagiographies and autobiographies of Buddhist teachers and other religious figures of Tibet, the DDZG reports that ’Jigs med tshe ring’s birth was accompanied by propitious manifestations (*bzang po’i rtags mtshan*) and marvelous signs (*ngo mtshar ltas*).[400] Two particularly auspicious signs accompanying his birth are recorded by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje in his DDZG. The first auspicious indication was that his birth coincided with a major Buddhist anniversary. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje was born on the fifteenth day of *sa ga zla ba*, a date that is highly auspicious for Buddhists because it is considered the anniversary of the birth of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni.[401] The second auspicious sign was that at the time of ’Jigs med tshe ring’s birth, many ordinary people experienced visions of deities and “many holy beings” (*dam pa du ma*). The term *dam pa* usually refers to excellent religious beings and figures. Their appearance welcomed the birth as a good and auspicious event. It is worth noting here that in the DDZG both expressions, *sa ga zla’i bco lnga* and *dam pa du ma*, and many other locutions including key names and personal names, are written in red ink as opposed to the rest of the writing that is written in black so as to emphasize their importance.

The oldest of seven siblings, ’Jigs med tshe ring was sent to tend the family’s yak herd on the pasture when he was still a child.[402] We do not know much about his parents apart from their names; Tshe ring lha mo was his mother’s name and Mi ’gyur was his father’s name. According

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[400] DDZG, f. 5b, 7.
[401] DDZG, f. 5b, 5. *Sa ga zla ba*, the month of Vaiśākha, is the sixth of the twelve months (*nyi skar gyi dbang du byas pa'i zla ba bcu gnyis*), according to the Indian Buddhist lunar calendar.
[402] bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s personal communication. August 2000.

to various and vague oral communications received in Tibet, predominantly within bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's community, Mi 'gyur was once a chieftain (*dpon po*) of a small community of clans that dominated the whole area of Chos gling lha ru.[403] Some other people who claim to know about bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life declare that Mi 'gyur was a cruel and ruthless bandit who indulged in robberies.[404]

Whatever Mi 'gyur's image and attitude may have been among locals and fellow countrymen, from my experience with bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje it is clear that his father had a profound effect on him as a child. Already at a very young age 'Jigs med tshe ring experienced a deep sense of discomfort with the mundane world and felt he had nothing in common with fellow villagers. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje remembers that in 1933, as a young twelve-year old boy, he already showed an inclination to communicate with the deities and demons of the world.[405] Apparently, the young 'Jigs med tshe ring's spiritual attitude did not impress the community as not only fellow villagers but also his own parents frowned upon his behavior. From what I can gather, it seems that the villagers were annoyed by the young 'Jigs med tshe ring's behavior and even beat him and treated him as insane despite his young age. 'Jigs med tshe ring's parents were eventually forced to send their son away from the village, and they suggested that he started his life away from home. 'Jigs med tshe ring thus left home when he was twelve years old and began his wandering life begging for food and looking for shelters in solitary locales (*dben gnas*), charnel grounds (*dur khrod*), forests (*nag tshal*), and on the banks of lakes (*mtsho gling*).[406]

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[403] bKra shis mtsho mo's oral communication. gNas chen padma mountain hermitage, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP). July 1998. Apart from a few individuals among bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's disciples such as gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan, there might still be some older people who have memories of meeting bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje during his early life. However, the disciples of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje were unable to tell me more about Mi 'gyur, his father or direct me to people who might remember some details. See below for more details about bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's father.

[404] Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che's oral communication. Taoyuan, Taiwan, Nov. 2002. During my fieldwork I have often attempted to gain access to some information about Mi 'gyur, but I always sensed a feeling of discomfort in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje whenever I tried to do so. This suggests a certain dramatic role that the man had played in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's early years as a young boy.

[405] DDZG, f. 6a.

[406] bKra shis mtsho mo's oral communication. gNas chen padma hermitage, sKye rgu mdo, (Yushu TAP), September 1998. bSam gling tshe bzang rin po che also confirmed this version of the facts although he admitted that he heard the events by word of mouth, not from bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che's oral communication. Taoyuan, Taiwan, Nov. 2002. Both bKra shis mtsho mo and Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che also added that they do not believe in this story and they think it is not true because bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has always referred to his father as a very devoted person. Although in English *mtsho gling* is usually rendered as "islands," I translated it "banks of lakes" following bKra shis mtsho mo's suggestion.

According to a second oral version narrating bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s early years, some people believe that Mi ’gyur, ’Jigs med tshe ring’s father, was a vagabond who spent most of his days far from home together with a small group of associates cruelly assaulting and robbing travelers. Because of his father’s villainous life, the young ’Jigs med tshe ring was continually the object of defamatory assaults and often physical abuse from the villagers. He was forced to spend increasing amounts of time away from his home until he decided to leave his village and family for good. During these years he survived by begging for food and sleeping outside villages often in solitude in charnel grounds and forests.[407]

We do not have evidence for either version of the story.[408] Whatever the truth is, in the DDZG, there are a couple of lines where bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje hints to a troubled childhood. Under heavy pressure from an unnamed person, he was compelled to wander aimlessly like a crazy person until he was twelve years old.[409] His early life as a child was affected by conflicts within his village community. It was this heavy pressure on ’Jigs med tshe ring that forced him into a solitary and wandering life. It is worth noting that instead of being explicit about the reasons why these troubles began, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje highlights the spiritual aspects of those early events, which were characterized by intense personal visionary activities. Although it may strike one as unusual for a child or young boy in his early teens to experience such visionary states without proper acquaintance with religious practice and instruction, this is not an uncommon narrative strategy in Tibetan hagiographies. However, the sad aspects of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s childhood and the psychological burden that eventually forced him to a solitary life already at a young age were counterbalanced by a longing for isolation and a life in remote mountains and ravines.

It was in the isolation of these remote environments that he experienced his first visionary encounters. Padmasambhava, emperor Khri srong lde’u btsan, his son the prince Mu khri btsan po, and Khri srong lde’u btsan’s assistants (*rje ’bangs grogs lnga*) including Ye shes mtsho rgyal, Śāntarakṣita, Vairocana, and rGyal ba mchog dbyangs all appeared to the young ’Jigs med tshe ring inspiring a deep sense of self-confidence to embark on his future career.[410] In the Tibetan religious world where mystic experience and asceticism are held in the highest regard,

[407] Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che’s oral communication. Taoyuan, Taiwan, 2002.
[408] bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, himself, has never showed particular interest in providing detailed information about his family.
[409] DDZG, f. 6a.
[410] DDZG, f. 5b.

visions and dreams play a fundamental role in a religious adept's spiritual life and are often considered gateways to direct perception and authentic methods of spiritual instruction.[411] Therefore, they are believed to be critical for the acknowledgment of a yogi's experiential achievements.

Whatever dramatic and troublesome events took place that led 'Jigs med tshe ring to isolation during his childhood, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje today portrays it as a phase of his spiritual path by highlighting his visions as an initiatory introduction to his life as a Tantric practitioner and Treasure revealer.

It was therefore at a time of discouraging personal circumstances and hardship that the young 'Jigs med tshe ring began to experience his first intense visionary encounters with religious personages of the past and to have "conversations" with deities and demons of the phenomenal world (*snang srid lha 'dre rnams dang 'gro gleng byas*).[412] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje understands his early social isolation as motivated by his higher call towards spiritual needs rather than mundane and societal matters, explaining it by the fact that he felt he did not want to follow the lifestyle of ordinary human beings (*'gro ba mi yi spyod lam ma bsten pa*).[413] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's later acknowledgement of his difficult childhood and the way he dealt with it introduces us to some of the psychological strategies that often underlie the development of inner mystical experience and the renunciation of the mundane world. These include events such as social pressure, detachment and abandonment, partition and solitude, and social conflicts.

The expulsion or marginalization from the group either provoked or simply chosen, followed by the subject's "rebirth" as a different person acutely aware of his own spiritual potentialities is reminiscent of patterns found in many shamanic societies.[414] In such societies the shaman-to-be usually experiences a personal crisis and ritual death, in order to be re-born to the society he parted from as a special being, endowed with extraordinary faculties and skills. Upon

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[411] Sumegi (2008: 67-68).

[412] DDZG, f. 6a. *sNang ba dang srid pa'i lha*. In Buddhist terms generally, *snang srid*, literally the "appearance-existence," is the phenomenon produced by the illusionary dynamics of cyclic existence, i.e., the saṃsāric side of our lives. Thus it refers to all the appearances conditioned by karmic actions manifesting in the outer world of sentient beings (*sems can*) themselves. By extension the expression also refers to all the phenomena existing in *saṃsāra* (non-enlightened) and *nirvāṇa* (enlightened) worlds.

[413] DDZG, f. 6a.

[414] My analogy with shamanism does not necessarily imply that I view Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism as a form of shamanism or ecstatic doctrine. However, although this is not the place for such an endeavor, I think that some parallels or analogies do seem to exist. I am particularly referring to the initiatory dreams, ecstasies, visions, psychic isolation, sickness, death, and mystical resurrection that populate the sacred world of many shamanic societies described, for instance, by Eliade (1964), Lewis (1971, 1986), Samuel (1993), and Sumegi (2008).

his return, he participates in the community life as a shaman, a man of power and a "technician of the sacred."[415] In Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhist societies, death and rebirth experiences are valued for the religious meaning. Vajrayāna Buddhism both in India and Tibet favored personal experience often through unconventional means, and was thus different from mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhism. Furthermore, rebirth experiences give legitimacy to religious status and powers. Yogis and highly revered lamas gain their public recognition and legitimacy not only because of the inner spiritual development they acquire, but also by virtue of adventure and an altruistic acceptance of risk. These elements were clearly influential within medieval societies, such as eighth-century India and Tibet, where society assigned function, purpose, and dignity to non-monastic Tantric practitioners as well as monastics.[416]

This takes us back to the young 'Jigs med tshe ring's own experience. Beyond the historical facts, in anthropological terms the narrative device of detachment from a community and the enterprise of solitary travel and meditation experiences can be interpreted as a typical rite of passage. 'Jigs med tshe ring's early experience of unhappiness and suffering, from being an outcast from his own society to finally gaining mystical inspiration and leading a solitary life as a wanderer, provided the ground for his subsequent spiritual development. We will see below that these two discursive elements, the marginalization from his community and the embracing of a solitary lifestyle of a wanderer, play a fundamental role in the DDZG characterizing bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral representation of his spiritual development.

The early childhood episodes in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life shed some light on what led to his first experiences as a visionary. From a socio-psychological point of view, the social pressure from his community forcing the young 'Jigs med tshe ring to leave his home contributed to an early existential "crisis," which led to his experiences of visions. The choice of the ghastly places he used to inhabit as a young boy are also representative of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's conception of religious experience, which later significantly influenced his modes of Buddhist practice: solitary pilgrimage, rigorous meditation practice, eclectic and at times self-

[415] Eliade (1972 [1964]: 33).

[416] Examples of such recognized patterns of apologetic narratives of saints' lives within the Vajrayāna system are for instance those of Nāropa, the renowned tenth century saint from India, and Mi la ras pa, the eleventh-century Tibetan yogi. They both provide pertinent instances of how personal sufferings and the transformation from one status to another may indeed result in personal success. In the specific case of these two famous saints their hardship resulted in their final acceptance by their respective teachers (namely Tīlopa in the case of Nāropa, and Mar pa, in the case of Mi la ras pa), as privileged disciples. See Guenther (1986), Wilhelm (1965), Samuel (1993), Davidson (2002: 169-177; 293-303; 2005: 141-148).

taught education, and non-celibacy. Cemeteries, forests, ravines, isolated places, and caves are all sites commonly considered favorable for specific sets of yogic practices.[417] As mountains, lakes, and rivers are considered the abode of gods (*yul lha*, *sa bdag*) and burial and charnel grounds (*dur khrod*) are held as sacred because they host the ritual of dismemberment and disposal of the corpse and attendance of the deities of death, simply by visiting these places one accumulates vast spiritual merits (*bsod nams kyi tshogs*). As a young boy bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje would have already been familiar with Tibetan Buddhist sacred geography, and the positive karma one accumulates by visiting or living at such places belongs to a basic corpus of Tibetan popular religious culture.

In his writings bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's emphasis on his early engagements with forms of ritual practice and contemplation that anticipate a career as a Tantric practitioner and Treasure revealer emerges especially in the notion of *brtul bzhugs spyod pa* or "intentional behavior." This term appears in many of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's writings including personal compositions and Treasure scriptures.[418] In his autobiography, for instance, he recalls that when he was a young boy he engaged in *smyos pa'i brtul zhugs spyad [pa]* referring to an "intentional behavior of a mad person."[419] Such a notion is characteristic of advanced Tantric practitioners who have attained superior control of meditative techniques. In Tibet the persona of a "holy madman" or "crazy yogi" (*smyon pa*) is a distinctive normative feature of Tantric adepts and ascetic yogis especially belonging to the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions. Many Treasure revealers tended to manifest such behavior, among these Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1136-1204), O rgyan gling pa (1323-1360?), Thang ston rgyal po (1361?-1485), and Kun skyong gling pa (1396-1477).[420]

Visiting and dwelling in solitary and forbidding places such as charnel grounds, forests, and mountain ravines is a common style of practice among Tantric adepts especially followers of *gcod* (the discipline of "severance") and Treasure revealers.[421] Such a practice is developed to

[417] Dowman (1997: 235).
[418] The term often appears as *brtul zhugs spyod pa* in DGSM, f. 11b and in RPNP, f. 9b, as *brtul zhugs spyad* in DDZG, f. 6a, and simply as *brtul zhugs* in TM, f. 5b.
[419] DDZG, f. 6a.
[420] See Cyrus Stearn's study of Thang ston rgyal po for an overview of this characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism in Stearn (2007: 58-80). See also Samuel (1993: 290-308). The lateTreasure revealer O rgyan sku gsum gling pa, for instance, was known for his claims to be a *gter smyon* or "crazy Treasure revealer." He discussed this in many sections of his autobiography. See A bu dkar lo (2003: 89-97).
[421] The discipline of *gcod*, meaning "severance" or "cutting off" refers to the system of contemplation techniques traditionally attributed in Tibet to the eleventh-century Indian master Pha dam pa sangs rgyas and further elaborated

enhance particular aspects of the Tantric path associated with the elimination of attachment to mundane life and the cultivation of control over emotions. In the DDZG, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje describes himself as already tending towards these forms of yogic conduct and eccentric behavior since he was a child.

The belief that disciplined asceticism, the rigors of isolation, retreat for meditation in caves, and pilgrimage are conducive to the abandonment of mundane life and departure from the conventionality of ordinary existence is often emphasized by the performance of austerities. In his writings bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje frequently describes this aspect of his lifestyle as the ideal of the yogi when he mentions the practice of austerities (*dka’ spyad*, Skt. *tapas*).[422] Austerities and exertion or perseverance (*’bad rtsol*) are among the central components of the yogi’s lifestyle who aims at achieving experience (*nyams*) and ultimate spiritual realization (*rtogs*).

## *Early Training, Eclecticism, and Self-Teaching*

As we have seen, drawing upon a well-established model of Buddhist biographies, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s autobiography in general follows hagiographies and life stories of Buddhist figures and saints of the past. What it is worth noting, however, is that never in the DDZG is there any specific mention of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s family, his life as a householder, or his Tantric consorts (*gzungs ma*).

As Janet Gyatso has observed in her study of the great *gter ston* ’Jigs med gling pa (1730-1798):[423]

> The struggle to establish the legitimacy of the Nyingmapa lineages, in tandem with a proclivity towards Buddhist iconoclasm, could produce a notable incongruity in the self-conception of leaders such as Jigme Lingpa. Both his outer and secret autobiographies display his conformity with exemplary

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by his most eminent Tibetan female disciple Ma gcig lab sgron (1055-1143). The practice of *gcod* is centered on the idea that it is possible to eliminate attachment to worldly life and ego-clinging emotions through a series of visualizations and meditative practices aimed at uprooting the belief in an inherently existent “self.”

[422] DGSM, f. 11b.

[423] ’Jigs med gling pa mkhyen brtse ‘od zer also known as ’Jigs med gling pa rang ’byung rdo rje (1730-1798) was a renown *gter ston* and respected rNying ma teacher whose revelations have left a mark in the literary legacy of the school. Among his most well-known productions contained in his impressive *gsung ’bum* is the *kLong chen snying tig*, a series of teachings on the *rdzogs chen* system of meditation. In 1762 ’Jigs med gling pa founded a retreat center in ’Phyong rgyas in the Yar lung valley of Lho kha, south of Lhasa, the Tshe ring ljongs padma ’od gsal theg mchog gling. Gyatso (1998).

patterns, while also exhibiting markedly individualistic sentiments—sometimes even in the same passage.[424]

In bDe chen ’od gal rdo rje’s case too, just like ’Jigs med gling pa, his loyalty to tradition and the need to conform with patterns of model attitude and behavior are identifiable in his autobiography. His description of personal achievements, his understanding of experiences through visionary activities, and the reception of prophecies in concert with the citation of many religious personalities’ laudatory comments lead the reader to the conclusion that he is Padmasambhava’s disciple and a legitimate Treasure revealer, and, paraphrasing a classic Buddhist metaphor, the cure for the teachings and living beings (*bstan ’gro gso sman*).[425]

Despite the solitary lifestyle after his departure from his family village, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje began his religious training relatively early when he was about twelve years old and met the Sa skya lama ’Jam mgon bkra shis chos ’phel at the dPal kha’i bla chen monastery of Nang chen in 1932.[426] Although bKra shis chos ’phel was bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s first teacher, the one who taught him the fundamentals of reading and writing and introduced him to Buddhist practice, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje does not elaborate on this religious figure in his biographical writings. bKra shis chos ’phel gave the young ’Jigs med tshe ring his first Tantric name, Nus ldan rdo rje, and instructed him on elementary sets of practices. These teachings established the orientation of his future Tantric practices that would include the *nā ro mkha’ spyod*, “Nāropa’s *khecharī*/sky-goer” or the Vajrayoginī practices of realization according to the tradition of the great Indian saint Nāropa (1016-1100).[427] bKra shis chos ’phel also praised and welcomed ’Jigs med tshe ring’s early visions, considering them auspicious and announcing a promising future.[428]

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[424] Gyatso (1998: 128).
[425] NNPB (1999: line 29).
[426] In bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s biographical writings bKra shis chos ’phel is referred to under a few different names: Gung pa bkra shis chos ’phel, ’Jam mgon bkra shis chos ’phel, and simply bKra shis chos ’phel. My conversations with bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and bKra shis rgyal mtshan were not very fruitful in determining the biographical information of this twentieth-century religious person. Apparently, he was associated with the dPal be’u ru’i bla chen dgon or dPal be’u ru rnam rgyal bde chen gling ngam be’u ru’i bla chen dgon (also called dPal kha’i bla chen) a Sa skya monastery in Nang chen rdzong. I have found two Sa skya religious figures who could lead us to a closer identification with bKra shis chos ’phel: Byams pa bkra shis chos ’phel and mKhan chen bkra shis chos ’phel. They both apparently lived in the nineteenth century.
[427] Abbot of the Buddhist monastery of Nālandā in the eleventh century, Nāropa set off in search of a well-known Tantric practitioner of his time, with whom lived and practiced for several years. This teacher was the *mahāsiddha* Tīlopa (988-1069), who put his disciple through a series of twelve trials and then gave him a specific set of Tantric teachings, which become known in Tibetan as the *nāro chos drug*, or the “six *yoga*s of Nāropa.” Nāropa has been highly glorified in Tibet not only for his lineage, but also for being the main teacher of another of Tibet’s most famous yogis, the claimed founder of the bKa’ brgyud order, Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros (1012-1097/99).
[428] DDZG, f. 6a.

As we have already seen in the first part of his narration in the DDZG and elsewhere, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s religious world and his visionary and dream experiences had a significant impact on his mystic development. In his narrative of the events of his life and especially of his religious formation, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje constantly highlights his achievements gained during long training and the encouragement teachers and other religious personalities gave him during his formative years. Visions and dreams are a fundamental vehicle of a Treasure revealer’s process of self-identification. When teachers and religious mentors recognize the validity and sincerity of their disciple’s visionary and dream experiences, the aspiring Treasure revealer’s career begins to acquire legitimacy and credibility. In this case, visions are doubly important since they play a pivotal role of the beginning of the visionary’s career as they announce signs of his potentials and during the course his career as they become one of the visionary’s most common channels for Treasure revelation.

### *Travels, Pilgrimages, and the Force of Experience*

The early life of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje was interspersed with significant emotional anxiety. This forced him as a young boy to leave his village and set off on a solitary journey in search of a new life. From study of the written material and personal conversations it is my sense that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s early life and his solitary adventures and pilgrimages clearly reflect predominant features of both bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s religious practice as well as his idealized religious world.

The DDZG reports that because he was concerned about the young ’Jigs med tshe ring’s turbulent and difficult years, bKra shis chos ’phel suggested that in order to remove obscurations (*sgrib sbyong*) accumulated in the past, ’Jigs med tshe ring undertake a long pilgrimage to Lhasa to perform prostrations to the Jo bo statue of Śākyamuni Buddha in the gTsug lag khang main temple (*jo bo mjal phyag mtshal*).[429] Pilgrimage and visits to sacred places are central in bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s formation as a Tantric adept and religious personality. How are we to understand pilgrimage in this context?

A defining characteristic of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s early cultural milieu that has shaped his identity today is nomadism. Nomadic existence is characterized by a life on the

[429] DDZG, f. 6a.

margins, both socially and economically.[430] This is still observable in many pastoral areas of Khams and A mdo today. Nomadism and its limited financial reward stands in clear contrast with a sedentary lifestyle that focuses on material gain, accumulations of resources, and in some cases luxury. However, elements in the nomadic lifestyle, such as the scarcity of food, the barter system, the absence of accommodations, and the simplicity of material circumstances constitute the real "freedom" of nomadism, a freedom that equals movement and the absence of attachment to any fixed place.[431] Furthermore, as mobility is the essential condition of nomadic societies, adaptability and receptivity to innovation is also required and nowadays this can be particularly observed in the widespread use of cell phones and motorcycles, two items that do not require infrastructure and aid mobility.[432]

Another recurrent theme that stands out in the main body of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's autobiographical writing is that of travel, journey, and pilgrimage. Travel, pilgrimage, and visits to monasteries and teachers, are all events that are frequently reported in Tibetan biographies and autobiographies of saints and religious figures. This theme emphasizes the change and transformation of the individual through a ritual voyage that reflects an inner spiritual transformation into a new being, which is often spiritually richer, wiser, and commanding in authority. In this sense, travel is meant as transformation primarily of social status, which leads to acquisition of fame, fortune, and honor. The transformation of the person's social status happens with the simultaneous territorial passage. As Eric Leed elaborates, "the social transformations of travel are closely connected to the origins of identity, the ways by which a person's "self" is defined and made visible."[433]

Through travel, the social being shapes and re-shapes his "self" when encountering others and facing new circumstances and living in new environments. Travel allows for such transformations while the traveler's mind acquires a new experiential background. Identity, by definition, is created by similitude and comparison with others and indeed "the transformations of the social being in travel suggest that there is no self without an other."[434] It is therefore through recognition, observation, and identification by others that the categories of a persona come to constitute the essence and the reality of a social being.

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[430] Leed (1991: 236).
[431] Leed (1991: 237-239).
[432] Leed (1991: 237-239).
[433] Leed (1991: 263).
[434] Leed (1991: 264).

If we read bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life with these notions in mind, his departure as a young boy was a separation from his social community, and also a departure from alienation, and therefore a beginning of selfhood. He separated himself from his social and cultural matrix to set off on what became a heroic journey in search of fame and a more significant life. We might not know exactly if the young ’Jigs med tshe ring’s departure was voluntary or if it was forced on him. However, with this departure and the dramatic circumstances that led him into solitary life in sacred places, using Leed’s words, his travels became “a demonstration of freedom from necessity, the mark of a status above the ‘commons’.”[435] The pilgrimage and the travels thus become also a sort of voyage of discovery where the traveler/pilgrim witnesses the transmutation of the heroic journey into a consciously chosen opportunity to demonstrate an identity as freedom, self-display, and self-discovery.

The literary device of departure in bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s written accounts of solitary wanderings around sacred and remote places represents the abandonment of his social matrix and his ordinary life (although only that of a young boy), to enter the path of sainthood. This rupture separates the individual, ’Jigs med tshe ring/bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, from a fixed social matrix—in our specific case ’Jigs med tshe ring’s home and community, and from that group of relations that define identity. This detachment is an event that constructs one as an autonomous and self-contained social entity. A departure from home evokes with great intensity those emotions characteristic of all partings: protest, grief, mourning, and detachment.[436]

The self-conscious employment of expressions such as “until I was twelve I intentionally behaved like a mad person” as bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje writes in his autobiography, identifies an early stage of his spiritual journey to mark a specific and meaningful event; that of detachment and rootlessness on the one hand, and the beginning of the constitution of holiness on the other.[437] The death of the social self suffered by the young boy expelled by his community provided the opportunity to create a new identity. Within the spiritual quest of the young ’Jigs med tshe ring, we should not underestimate the value that separation, pilgrimage, and travel had for his personal development. The centrality of these elements is particularly pertinent if we recall that both the detached individual and the sanctification of separations incurred in

[435] Leed (1991: 12).
[436] Cf. Coleman and Elsner (1995: 192-195).
[437] *bcu gnyis lo bar smyos pa’i brtul zhugs spyad*. DDZG, f. 6a.

departures create the meaning for the experience of travel. After all, each departure is meaningful as a recapitulation of a personal and cultural history.

In the DDZG, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje does not fail to remind the reader that it was while wandering across mountains and ravines that he had his first intense visions. Later, during his pilgrimage to Lhasa, he again experienced intense mystical states in which he encountered deities.[438] It was also during these formative experiences, he recalls, that he generated aversion towards material wealth and an urge to disengage himself from mundane matters.[439]

As already seen above, pilgrimage has played a major role in the early life of 'Jigs med tshe ring. Pilgrimage is one of the major forms of religious practice throughout the history of Buddhism. Across the Buddhist world, the most popular sacred place that attracts Buddhist pilgrims from all over Asia is Bodhgaya (or Bodh Gaya, a city in today's Indian state of Bihar) where prince Gautama Siddhārtha is believed to have achieved enlightenment sitting under a pipal tree. According to tradition, it was the Buddha himself who, just before dying, gave final instructions to his closest disciples concerning the establishment of sacred sites that would honor his remains.[440] Each region and area of the Buddhist world has its own pilgrimage sites and holy places, whether they be temples, shrines, statues, *stūpa*s, monasteries, nunneries, sacred mountains and lakes, or the dwellings of ascetics, mystics, and saints. The social and religious role of pilgrimage can be appreciated when we consider that within the cultural matrix of Tibet, the transformation of holy places in the land was a powerful stratagem for the process of subjugation of the geographical landscape under the domain of Buddhism. Land deities (*sa bdag*), such as mountain and lake gods, already central in pre-Buddhist folk cults, were gradually incorporated within Buddhist rites.[441] Accordingly, sacred sites for pilgrimage were assimilated and transformed into Buddhist grounds, their chthonic significance retained, and their geomantic position secured with the construction of temples, shrines, monasteries, and hermitages.

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[438] DDZG, f. 5b.
[439] DDZG, f. 7a.
[440] Strong (2004: 98-123); Lopez (2002: 207), and Schopen (1997: 99-113).
[441] The *sa bdag*, or *sa'i bdag po*, are the lords of the land, the masters of the place, often rendered in English as earth-owning deities as the Tibetan term seems to ontologically imply a certain "ownership" of the land. Cf. Karmay (1996: 59-75). In Tibetan texts the term *sa bdag* refers to non-human spirits and deities who inhabit and control local areas, and together with their fellow divinities, the *yul lha*, or mountian-deities, the *sa bdag* are iconographically classified as *'jig rten pa'i srung ma*, or mundane protectors, a class of gods and deities supposed to reside in different geographical places of Tibet. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956: 203-204), Blondeau and Steinkellner (1996), and Blondeau (1998).

In Tibet, ritual pilgrimage (*gnas skor*) is extremely popular and it is performed at various geographic levels.[442] On a regional level, for instance, the most popular form of pilgrimage for villagers is to make circumambulations around sacred mountains believed to be abodes of local gods (*yul lha*) and land deities (*sa bdag*). On a national level, the most ambitious form of religious pilgrimage takes one towards central Tibet and especially to Lhasa, the capital, and to major sacred mountains and lakes such as Mount Kailash (Gangs rin po che) and Lake gNam mtsho. Since the sixteenth century, Lhasa has been the religious and political center of Tibet with thousands of monks convening from various parts of the country in order to study at one of the major dGe lugs pa Buddhist institutes including dGa' ldan, Se ra, and 'Bras spungs. The oldest Buddhist monuments and temples directly associated with the early introduction and diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century are also located in Lhasa, such as the Ra mo che temple and the gTsug lag khang, or in the south not far from Lhasa, the monastery of bSam yas, established during the eight-century reign of emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan and associated with the Indian saint Padmasambhava.

The story of Padmasambhava, as we have seen in Chapter One, is central to the issue of the introduction and diffusion of Buddhism of Tibet and the subjugation of chthonic deities and demons that control geomantic energies. In the specific case of sacred places, Padmasambhava's role was pivotal in taming local deities and transforming them into guardians in the service of Buddhism and thus sanctifying the geographical landscape. In Tibet, especially in central Tibet around the bSam yas area, there are a variety of cave-hermitages considered to be places of extraordinary geomantic significance and are venerated as Treasure places linked to Padmasambhava. Associated with these specific events, these places are magnets for hermits and pilgrims alike. The place where a Treasure (*gter ma*) is discovered and the location from which it is materially retrieved, or the "hidden" area (*sbas yul*) that is opened by a *gter ston*, becomes imbued with sacredness and is transformed into a destination of pilgrimage not only for the local populace, but also for devotees journeying from neighboring areas.

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje thus embraced a centuries-old practice in Tibet, a practice performed by nuns, monks, and laypeople alike. The latter are especially involved in the practice of pilgrimage, which is an optimal occasion for the accumulation of both merit and blessings, thus improving not only chances for a fortunate rebirth in the future, but also a healthier and

[442] Huber (1994).

more prosperous life in the present. In Tibetan societies a pilgrim who has visited many sites and practiced meditation sessions in sacred caves and monasteries is held in high regard by other members of his community.

The social role of pilgrimage, being an activity of traveling societies, is to unify.[443] However, one of the most striking characteristics of pilgrimage in its ritual meaning is the often powerful renunciatory aspect of its performance.[444] Many Asian societies seem to share this feature associated with pilgrimage. Asceticism and renunciation do appear in many of the religious performances of pilgrimage across Asia.[445] The fatigue of travel and the difficulties of long journeys contribute to the transformation of the traveler and of the pilgrim enriching them with spiritual experience that leads to wisdom. Pilgrimage, according to Leed, is therefore "the institutionalization of this transformation of travel."[446] Pilgrimage purifies and cleanses the traveler from his/her violations. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's was advised to perform a long pilgrimage to central Tibet, the most sacred and most popular of all Tibetan sacred places to remove the obstacles created by unfortunate circumstances and negative karmic traces stemming from a previous existence.[447]

Having traveled extensively in many areas of Tibet, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's experience of pilgrimage includes long journeys outside of Tibet as well. In the DDZG bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje writes that he continued his pilgrimage to great sacred places (*gnas chen*) of the Himalayan range such as Mon (a name usually referring to southern regions of Tibet on the border with Bhutan), Bhutan, Sikkim, and Eastern India. While traveling outside Tibet in the first half of the twentieth century was not unusual, it was nevertheless a perilous activity for solitary travelers.

## *Teachers, Teachings, and Religious Formation*

[443] Leed (1991: 244).
[444] Although merit accumulation and ritual performance are indeed the major normative facets of pilgrimage as a religious practice, some scholars have highlighted the economic and the social implications involved in pilgrimage. See Huber (1994).
[445] Within the Hindu context, for instance, pilgrimage is seen as an opportunity to experience a form of temporary renunciation of the world. See Coleman and Elsner (1995: 150).
[446] Leed (1991: 11).
[447] *sgrib sbyong*. This refers to the practice, still very popular in Tibet today, of cleansing one's obscurations or hindrances (*sgrib*).

In the Tibetan hagiographic traditions, one of the central features is the discussion concerning one's root teachers (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*). The *bla ma* contributes significantly to the education of the subject of the biography as he is considered particularly valuable for the development of the character of his disciples and the authority of his lineage. Additionally, the inclusion of a description of the teachings received and the practices performed increases the religious value of the biography and provides credibility to the Buddhist scholar. These two elements, i.e., the teachers followed and the teachings received, are essential elements in the biography of a religious personality as they support his/her legitimacy, authority, and credibility as a qualified teacher.

Records of main teachers and a register of the teachings received are also contained in other genres of Tibetan religious literature often complementary to a saint's auto/biography. These can be *skyes rabs gsol 'debs* (reverantial prayers to successive incarnations), *bla brgyud gsol 'debs* (reverential prayers to the teachers of the lineage), *gser 'phreng* ("golden rosaries," or biographical accounts according to the succession of eminent masters of a lineage), *bla ma'i rnal 'byor* (Skt. *guruyoga*), and *thob yig*, or *gsan yig*, a specific register of teachings received.[448] However, it would not be unusual for Tibetan biographers to include these important elements of a saint's religious curriculum within the auto/biographical account. The *bla ma'i rnal 'byor*, for instance, is not simply a record of teachers. Rather, it has the specific purpose for the disciple of supplicating (*gsol 'debs*) one's root teacher and the entire lineage from which he received the teachings.[449]

As for bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, a list of teachers in the form of lineage records (*brgyud pa*) is the *skyes rabs*, the record of past lives. However, despite the ritual value of the scripture, there is little significant historical information in this kind of text. In fact, the *skyes rabs* often provides insights into a *bla ma*'s self-representation and identity in terms of the high personalities allegedly encountered and teachings received in previous lives.[450] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has composed both a *bla ma'i rnal 'byor* and a *skyes rabs gsol 'debs*. The former is the *bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje yi zab lam bla ma'i rnal 'byor* (henceforth LMNB), written at the

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[448] See Smith (2001: 39).
[449] It is worth noting here that the practice of *guru yoga* is still much alive in today's Tibet and considered by many as an oral device for the memorization of a lineage. An anecdote concerning the uses of *guru yoga* is that when I met the Treasure revealer bDud 'dul mgon po (?-2003) in September 2000 and asked him to tell me about his teachers, he recited to me his *guru yoga* instead of giving me a text or writing down the names of his teachers.
[450] Tucci (1949: 151) seems to consider the *skyes rabs* (Skt. *jātaka*) similar to the *rnam thar* for their capacity in providing information about the protagonist in the form of his religious identity and his past lives.

request of one of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s closest disciples, Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che (*bla ma tshe bzang*).[451] The latter is the *Pra bha swa badzra’i skyes rabs gsol ’debs bsdus pa tshigs su bcad pa* (A Short Reverential Prayer in Verse to Prabhāsva vajra’s Previous Existences). This is a versified composition in which bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje has recorded his major previous lives beginning with the Indian ’Phags pa ’od zer,[452] Klu byang dpal,[453] bLo gros dga’ bo,[454] and Klu yi byang chub,[455] as well as two early students of Padmasambhava in Tibet, (Ngan lam) rGyal ba mchog dbyangs and Shud bu dpal gyi seng ge.[456] In his present existence bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje was recognized as a reincarnation of Shud bu dpal gyi seng ge, one of the supposed principal disciples of Padmasambhava.[457] In the Tibetan Treasure tradition a Treasure revealer’s ability to recall his previous lives and claim connection to Padmasambhava is fundamental to his legitimacy as qualified assistant and messenger (*pho nya*) of Padmasambhava.

According to his autobiography and his recollections bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje spent most of his life as a teenager from 1934 to 1942 in Central Tibet and traveling across the Himalayas and India. During his long journeys across central Tibet, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje visited some of the most renowned Buddhist places and institutions of the country. On many occasions he visited and received teachings from Buddhist teachers of various affiliations. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje embraced an open-minded doctrinal approach that was oriented more to practice and experience rather than to an intense and profound scholastic study of Buddhist scriptures.

Among his encounters in Lhasa, the most influential seems to have been with *dge bshes* Phug cog byams mgon. This was probably one of the eminent reincarnations of the Phur bu lcog lineage based in Lhasa and represented in the nineteenth century by the well-known Blo bzang

[451] LMNB, f. 4b.
[452] This name is unidentified.
[453] Klu byang dpal = Klu ’jams dpal. Unidentified name.
[454] According to bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, bLo gros dga’ bo was one of the disciples of the Buddha. He probably refers to Kun dga’ bo (Skt. Ānanda). bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s personal communication. Ri phug kha ri khrod, 2000.
[455] According to bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, kLu yi byang chub is an epithet of Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Mādhyamika school of Indian Buddhism. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s personal communication. Ri phug kha ri khrod, 2000.
[456] For biographical information about these two figures see Thondup (1984: 150-164). For Shud bu dpal gyi seng ge, see also Dudjom (1991: 535).
[457] Thondup (1984: 162).

tshul khrims byams pa rgya mtsho (1825-1901).[458] Considering that this Phur lcog byams pa rgya mtsho passed away twenty years before bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje was born, it is more likely that in Lhasa he met his successor, Thub bstan byams pa tshul khrims bstan ’dzin (b. 1902?).[459] It seems that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje was impressed by the Phur lcog dge bshes’s personality and erudition. He spent enough time with him to receive various teachings, including the *dga’ ldan lha brgya*. Composed by the great Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682), the *dga’ ldan lha brgya* is a *guru yoga* practice was dedicated to Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa (1357-1419).

### *Practice and Spiritual Achievements*

Despite his young age (at that time he must have been around fourteen or fifteen years old), the period bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje spent in Lhasa and central Tibet was productive in terms of spiritual achievements and personal goals. In the DDZG he proudly racalls that the people around him were impressed by the yogic achievements gained by his training at this time. He writes that he also achieved the skill of flying or levitating in air.[460] Indeed, he explains, that he achieved what he calls the realization and unification of the “three secrets of the teacher” (*bla ma’i gsang gsum*):[461]

> I achieved the realization of the unification of the Three Secrets of the Guru.
> Therefore the supreme accomplishments of contemplative experience and realization increased rapidly,
> And I cut the attachment to the eight worldly concerns.[462]

In the DDZG, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje emphasizes his experiential achievements (*nyams*) that led to his realization (*rtogs pa*) of the futility of attachment to ordinary matters. bDe chen ’od

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[458] I am particularly grateful to Tashi Tsering of the Amnye Machen Institute for his help in identify this religious figure. This reincarnation lineage was apparently based at the Phur bu lcog ri khrod (Phur bu lcog ri khrod byang chub gling) a small retreat hermitage belonging to the Se ra byes college of Se ra monastery just outside Lhasa. Cf. TBRC, Place RID: G156.
[459] Cf. TBRC, Person RID: P00EGS109637.
[460] DDZG, f. 6b.
[461] The *bla ma'i gsang ba gsum*, or the Three Secrets of the Teacher, are a central point in the teaching of Vajrayāna Buddhism. Such a triad refers to the indestructible realities of a Buddha and is comprised as follows: *sku'i gsang ba* (the secret of the Body), *gsung gi gsang ba* (the secret of the Speech), and *thugs kyi gsang ba* (the secret of the Mind).
[462] DDZG, f. 6b.

gsal rdo rje points out that he managed to eliminate ignorance and thus achieved awareness, something fundamental and pivotal to a Buddhist practitioner's quest for enlightenment. In Tibetan Buddhism, *nyams* and *rtogs pa* are key terms that distinguish specific achievements in the path to spiritual liberation, especially in the practice of *rdzogs chen*. The concept of *nyams* concerns experiential practice free from conceptual intellectualization where meditation allows for a natural and spontaneous understanding. Therefore, this meditatively cultivated experience is germane to the practitioner's inner transformation. As a consequential process in which a constant and unchanging awareness (*rig pa*) emerges within the practitioner, *rtogs pa* is an understanding, or realization, of the nature of the practitioner's experiences and of all phenomena.

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje describes that he experienced a detachment (*snang zhen chod*) from the material world traditionally represented by the example of four pairs of diametrically opposite anxieties know in Tibetan as the "eight worldly concerns" (*'jig rten chos brgyad*).[463] Technically, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje claims he is a realized being, he has attained knowledge over the phenomena that most affect our human mind. Most importantly he has completely detached himself from these discursive phenomena, achieving a pure mind and an overall realization of the interdependence (*rten 'brel*) of all phenomena. This event will be fundamental in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life for, as he writes, at that time "everybody admired me and spoke words of praise to me."[464]

## *Himalayan Pilgrimage and Gro mo dge bshes rin po che*

Among the most influential teachers bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje recalls from those he encountered in his journeys across the Himalayan regions is Gro mo dge bshes rin po che. We do not have much information about this teacher of the *dge lugs* tradition. Much of what we can learn of Gro mo dge bshes rin po che has been passed on by a German traveler and Buddhist practitioner,

[463] The Tibetan term *'jig rten chos brgyad* is a translation of the Sanskrit *aṣṭa loka dharma*, and it refers to those worldly concerns pursuit of which, according to the Buddha, would only lead to further worldly engagement and therefore were to be avoided. These are listed in pairs of opposites: *rnyed pa* (gain) and *ma rnyed pa* (no gain), *bde ba* (pleasure) and *sdug bsngal* (suffering), *bstod pa* (praise) and *smad pa* (blame), *snyan pa* (fame) and *mi snyan pa* (infamy). Cf. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, p. 895.
[464] DDZG, f. 6b.

Ernst Lothar Hoffmann.[465] Better known in the West by his pseudonym, Anagarika Govinda, Hoffmann met Gro mo dge bshes rin po che and studied with him in Darjeeling in the 1930s. Born in 1898, this philosopher, scholar, and prolific writer traveled extensively across Southeast Asia, namely Burma and Ceylon, in the 1930s. He reached the town of Darjeeling in West Bengal and even traveled to Western Tibet when little scientific knowledge was available in the field of Asian studies.[466] In India Anagarika Govinda embraced the practice of Tibetan Buddhism after having met Gro mo dge bshes at Yid dga' chos gling monastery, also popularly known as Ghoom monastery, located in the small village of Ghoom along the road leading to Darjeeling.

Gro mo dge bshes rin po che, also known as dGe bshes ngag dbang skal bzang (1866-1934/1936), was born in Gangtok, Sikkim. Having been recognized as the reincarnation of Gro mo rin po che, former abbot of Dung dkar monastery in the Gro mo valley of southern Tibet, he was sent to Dung dkar monastery at a very young age in order to be properly educated as a monk.[467] At the age of seven, showing great intelligence in understanding the Buddhist teachings, he was then sent to Se ra monastery in Lhasa where he lived for many years until he received his degree of *dge bshes*.[468] In his writings, Anagarika Govinda provides many reflections on the personality of his teacher and the spiritual value for which he was renowned.[469] There is also a chapter in *The Way of the White Clouds* concerned with Gro mo dge bshes rin po che's most well-known charismatic gifts, namely his healing powers and the production of *ril bu* pills.[470]

Gro mo dge bshes rin po che's knowledge of the Buddhist doctrine and his healing powers must have deeply impressed bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. He was especially fascinated by the *bla ma*'s famous *ril bu* pills, which immediately captured his enthusiasm. One day, after having been accepted as one of the *bla ma*'s students, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje received both

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[465] See also Samuel (1993: 343-344).
[466] Some of Lama Anagarika Govinda's works are *Abhidhammattha Sangaha – Ein Compendium buddhistischer Philosophie und Psychologie* (München 1931); *Der Stupa – Psychokosmisches Lebens- und Todessymbol* (1976); and the autobiographical work *Der Weg der weißen Wolken* (1966, *The Way of the White Clouds*). For a (critical) view of Lama Anagarika Govinda and his role in the diffusion of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, see Lopez (1998: 46-85).
[467] Govinda (1974: 121).
[468] Govinda (1974: 122).
[469] Most of the information about Gro mo dge bshes rin po che can be accessed in Anagarika Govinda's book *The Way of the White Clouds: A Buddhist Pilgrim in Tibet*. For a biography of Anagarika Govinda see Winkler (1990).
[470] Govinda (1974: 93-98).

empowerments and some of the *ril bu* pills.[471] Anagarika Govinda, who might have been at Yid dga' chos gling monastery when bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje arrived, recalls that after his initiation under Gro mo dge bshes rin po che he himself received three *ril bu* pills. A Tibetan monk assisting him at the time explained to him how these medicine pills were considered effective even in case of serious illness.[472] Gro mo dge bshes rin po che, as bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje writes, was favorably impressed by the young Khams pa practitioner, for he expressed words of praise for bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and further predicted a brilliant future for him in the service of all human beings.[473]

Among the various teachings that Gro mo dge bshes rin po che gave to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, the DDZG refers to the important teachings of *blo sbyong* or "mind training."[474] These particular sets of teachings belong to the study of the nature of mind (*blo rigs*) constituting the essential curriculum in many Buddhist scholastic traditions. In Tibet, the exploration of the nature of the mind has characterized much of the *dge lugs* school's curriculum, especially for those monks who embrace the long path to the degree of *dge bshes*. One of the basic features of *blo sbyong* practice is to assist the students in focusing their attention on the true characteristics of the mind and the real origin of one's feelings and emotions in order to recognize them and eliminate their psychological influences. With the realization of one's own mind, one will be able to develop the proper attitude that will enable one to return to the primordial state of the mind free from all defilements.[475]

## *Return to Central Tibet*

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's explorations of the nature of the mind and its potentialities continued when he returned to Tibet and stopped again in the central regions of the plateau where he sojourned at Sa skya monastery.[476] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's spiritual exercises at Sa skya were particularly intense since he engaged in various challenging meditation sessions. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's yogic exertion focused on the performance of *gcod* practice, aimed at "cutting off"

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[471] DDZG, f. 6b.
[472] Govinda (1974: 94).
[473] DDZG, f. 6b.
[474] DDZG, f. 6b.
[475] Powers (1995: 419-420); Dreyfus (2003: 112).
[476] DDZG, f. 7a.

personal ego-fixating attachments to material matters. At Sa skya, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje developed his spiritual achievements, and rapidly realized that “all phenomena are delusions.”[477] He thus recalls that he succeeded in taming the apparitions of various deities of the *srung ma* (guardians) class whose attacks created miraculous phenomena or magical illusions (*cho ’phrul*) in an attempt to disturb him and test his resolve.

The practice of *gcod* is a meditative technique elaborated in India and further developed in Tibet in the eleventh century, where it was codified and diffused among practitioners by the efforts and charismatic skills of the great female Tantric practitioner Ma gcig lab sgron (1055-1153).[478] The value of this practice has been particularly appreciated in various Buddhist schools. Some schools were more focused on practice and contemplative experience-based traditions rather than developing advanced scholastic curricula. The major benefits sought in and expected by persevering in the practice of *gcod* are the elimination of one’s own afflictions and ego-clinging mental tribulations that affect the human mind to such a great degree. Probably more than any other meditative technique the clear-cut characteristic of *gcod* practice is the dramatic performance of its ritual aimed at eliminating, just like a “cut” or “severance” (*gcod*), all forms of one’s mental clinging and hindrances produced by worldly matters and especially those related to the physical and mental sense of “I.” The result of this practice is a natural state devoid of fear.[479]

The dramatization of the practice of *gcod* is best expressed by the practitioner’s unconventional behavior that in the Tibetan religious tradition is often accompanied by elements of madness (*smyos spyod*), and in the performance of the ritual. The *gcod* practitioners (*gcod pa*) tend to express their identity through a lifestyle that encourages practice sessions in charnel grounds, burial sites, forests, banks of lakes, and rivers, all of which in Tibetan religious imagery are popularly considered dwelling places of deities and demons, or “god-demons” (*lha ’dre*).[480] The predilection for such ghastly places in the fulfillment of such practices during the *gcod* ritual

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[477] DDZG, f. 7a.

[478] According to the study of Edou (1996:79-84), Ma gcig lab sgron received the teachings on the *gcod* practice from three different, although interlocked, sources of lineage transmission. The more historical transmission is from the Indian saint Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (d. 1117) who transmitted to her the tradition of *gcod* according to the *Prajñāpāramitā*. The second lineage transmission is the Vajrayāna *gcod* that Ma gcig lab sgron received in a vision from the goddess Tāra (*sgrol ma*). The third lineage was created and developed directly by Ma gcig lab sgron by systematizing the previous two teachings into a unique corpus of practices combined with her own meditative experiences. As for the dates of birth and death of Ma gcig lab sgron, see also Powers (1995: 371) who suggests 1055-1143. See also Drolma (2005), Harding (2003a), and Norbu (1986).

[479] Powers (1995: 371).

[480] Edou (1996: 63).

is motivated by the necessity of enhancing the practitioner's detachment from his body and attachment-related emotions. According to the practice of *gcod*, this detachment can be achieved by a practitioner visualizing his/her own body dissected into pieces and offered as food to demons and other non-human entities appearing (*cho 'phrul*) or visualized in front of the Tantric adept.[481] These forms of religious practice have been associated with a specific group of practitioners including itinerant renunciants (*bya bral ba*) and non-celibate Tantric practitioners (*sngags pa*). The seemingly horrific nature of *gcod* practice is germane to the *gcod* adepts' sense of identity and spiritual achievements.[482]

In his DDZG, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje writes that the various apparitions of Dharma protectors (*bka' srung*) and their disturbances disguised as magical apparitions (*cho 'phrul*) helped him to realize the deceptive nature of phenomena. He conveys the idea that he mastered the *gcod* practice perfectly, since his realization of the ephemeral nature of the phenomenal world was his major achievement.[483] His spiritual attempts were focused on liberation from worldly matters and the detachment from the limitations of the self. Tantric practices such as *gcod* and *rtsa lung thig le* promise the adept the possibility of acquiring power over appearances, mastering natural phenomena, and becoming freed from attachment.

While at Sa skya monastery, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje met the eminent throne holder of the Sa skya. Representative of the Phun tshogs pho brang, one of the two *pho brangs* or "mansions" that constitute the dynastic lineages of the Sa skya monastery (the other being the sGrol ma pho brang), Ngag dbang mthu stobs dbang phyug (1900-1950) served as the abbot and thirty-third Sa skya khri chen of the Sa skya monastery from 1937 until his death in 1950.[484] According to the DDZG, Ngag dbang mthu stobs dbang phyug accepted the young bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje under his protection and provided him with material and spiritual support. He let him

[481] For a description of *cho 'phrul* within the *gcod* practice see Edou (1996: 72-76).
[482] In Tibet the practice of *gcod* is predominantly sanctioned within lay and non-monastic communities. Although the practice of *gcod* is not uncommon and is even encouraged within some monastic communities, monks and nuns who practice *gcod* represent mainly rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.
[483] DDZG, f. 7a.
[484] His full name was Ngag dbang mthu stobs dbang phyug drag shul yon tan rgya mtsho bkra shis grags pa rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po, as reported in the title of his biography written by Kun dga' bstan pa'i nyi ma, *Shri sa skya pa sngags 'chang bla ma khri chen rdo rje 'chang ngag dbang mthu stobs dbang phyug drag shul yon tan rgya mtsho bkra shis grags pa rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa mdor bsdus bkra shis skye ba lnga pa'i sgra dbyangs* (Delhi: T.G. Dhongthog Rinpoche, 1980). I express my gratitude to Tashi Tsering of the Amnye Machen Institute in Dharamsala (India), and to Prof. Leonard van der Kuijp for their help in providing me these details.

stay at Sa skya monastery, gave him offerings, and also agreed to give him teachings.[485] Ngag dbang mthu stobs dbang phyug uttered prophesies about bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje predicting his beneficial role for the welfare of future generations.

After his experience at Sa skya, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje continued his pilgrimage to the sacred places of the gTsang area (*gtsang gnas chos 'khor yongs rdzogs mjal*). Although not specifically mentioned in his biography, he also visited various sites such as the Zhwa lu monastery, bKra shis lhun po monastery in gZhis ka rtse, and the great sKu 'bum stūpa of rGyal rtse.[486] However, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's journey to the best known sacred places of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition could not be completed without a sojourn at the major center of the Karma pa. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's visit to mTshur pu monastery took place during his travels in central Tibet (circa 1940-1942). There he had the opportunity to meet the sixteenth Karma pa rang 'byung rig pa'i rdo rje (1924-1981), who in his early twenties was just a few years younger than bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. This meeting must have been particularly significant for bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, for he would keep a strong connection with the bKa' brgyud teachings for the rest of his life.

For bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje the meeting with the Karma pa was significant for two reasons. First, the Karma pa rang 'byung rig pa'i rdo rje was impressed by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje given that he praised him for his achievements and made prophetic statements about the importance of his role for the welfare of the future beings, a proclamation typically interpreted as announcing a career as a Treasure revealer. The authorization and approval by a Karma pa is particularly sought after by aspiring Treasure revealers because the Karma pa is believed to represent the activity of enlightenment, and thus he has the power to increase their beneficial actions.[487] Second, as a sign of approval of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's association with the Transmission of the Profound Treasures (*zab gter bka' bab*), the young Karma pa rang 'byung rig pa'i rdo rje conferred upon him the names bDe chen rdo rje and 'Od gsal rdo rje and honored the young Tantric expert by conferring upon him a solemn proclamation (*'ja' tham chen mo*) about his future. Significantly, his commonly used names were given to him by a Karma pa hierarch, whereas his primary affiliation will be rNying ma. The Karma pa declared that he had

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[485] DDZG, f. 7a.
[486] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal communication. gNas chen padma hermitage, mount gNas chen padma, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, September 1998.
[487] See Schmidt and Schmidt (2005: 248; 389, n. 197).

peculiar qualities that would be beneficial for the Buddhist doctrine and sentient beings.[488] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje writes:

> As unhindered foreknowledge manifested, I received his prophecies.
> He conferred upon me an edict announcing that I would be beneficial in the future,
> Declaring that I had peculiar qualities beneficial to the Buddhist Teachings and the living beings.
> He [thus] authorized me [to disseminate] the teachings of the practice lineage in the regions of Khams.[489]

In these lines we can observe the importance that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje attached to his identity as a Khams pa and, therefore, his intentions to return to his homeland to pursue a career as a Treasure revealer and a Buddhist teacher. This is significant in our analysis of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life because his life and activities were always centered in Khams, thereby showing a conscious sense of belonging to the place and the social role he gained there. It could also be noted here that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's relationship with the bKa' brgyud tradition, which began with the encounter with the Sixteenth Karma pa was restrengthened once he returned to Khams. There he met another bKa' brgyud master, Kun bzang 'gro 'dul, who would become one of his most influential teachers.

It is clear at this point how bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's early life and spiritual formation were perceived as a stage in a gradual progress setting the groundwork for his transformation into a prominent figure within the Tibetan religious world. A reading of the DDZG helps us understand the aim of autobiography itself, which is to contribute to a saint's (self-)affirmation as a publicly recognized and qualified religious leader. In addition, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's travel, as already discussed above, is a fundamental manifestation of spiritual pilgrimage, and in the DDZG its primary role is to emphasize development and transformation. The passages that show bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's transition from childhood to adulthood and the attainment of a religious education under the care of several Buddhist masters aim at setting the ground for the author's eventual role as a Treasure revealer in the larger Buddhist community of Nang chen.

In his late forties, on the eve of the Chinese invasion of eastern Tibet, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje was traveling across Khams staying predominantly in the sKye rgu mdo and Nang chen areas where his fame as an expert Tantric professional was growing among the local populace.

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488 NTPB, Text 1, (1999: lines 22-25). These two names were also later confirmed by Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje. NTPB, Text 1 (1999: line 24-25).

489 DDZG, f. 7b.

Despite the tensions created by the worsening political situation, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje does not offer comments on those years in his autobiography, conveying the idea that the politically tensed atmosphere did not effect his life and religious activities. These were formative years for bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje when he established a network with other emerging religious personalities of the area such as mKhan po 'Chi med dbang chen rdo rje from Zur mang rnam rgyal brtse monastery, Chos gling shākya grags pa and mKhan po 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen rab from rDo rdo monastery,[490] 'Phrin las kun khyab from dGa' ldan monastery (rTsi zur mang dga' ldan thub bstan nge legs gling), mTshan nyid 'jam dpal nor bu from mTshan nyid monastery (mTshan nyid grwa tshang rnam rgyal chos 'khor gling),[491] the fourth mChog 'gyur gling pa of rTsi ke in Khams, and dKon mchog rgyal mtshan and sTong dga' rin po che from Ge lcags monastery.[492] It was at this time that he also had the opportunity to meet one of his most influential teachers Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje (also known as dPal me mkhyen brtse Kun bzang 'gro 'dul rdo rje, 1897-1946).[493]

## *The First Root-Teacher: Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje*

Among the most influential bKa' brgyud masters in Nang chen, Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje was born in the first month of the Fire-Bird year of the fifteenth cycle (1897). A fully ordained monk, Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje is remembered for being a Treasure revealer who excavated numerous earth Treasures (*sa gter*) in many areas of Nang chen and who left a collection of religious writings and teachings including mind Treasures and pure visions.[494] Recognized as

[490] These are all twentieth-century teachers and information about them is scare and fragmentary. The full name of rDo rdo dgon, also known as Chos gling rdo rdo dgon is dPal chos gling rdo rje bsam 'grub bde chen dar rgyas gling. A brief history of the monastery is reported in *Yul shul rdzong: dgon sde'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus* (1998, pp. 147-154). TBRC W00EGS1016676.
[491] 'Jam dpal nor bu padma dbang rgyal also known as rDza stod mtshan nyid sprul sku 'jam dpal nor bu (1892-1960).
[492] I do not have information about the lives of the former two religious figures. sTong dga' rin po che was the spiritual leader of Ru 'dren dge dgon, a small branch nunnery of Ge lcags, founded by the nineteenth century Ge lcags rtog ldan Tshang dbyangs rgya mtsho (nineteenth century). Currently, sTong dga' rin po che in his 90s lives in sKye rgu mdo township.
[493] I use Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje as his primary name because this is the name by which he is most commonly known and referred to within bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's community.
[494] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal communication. gNas chen padma hermitage, mount gNas chen padma, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP), Qinghai. August 1998. bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication, Ri phug kha hermitage, mount gNas chen padma, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP), Qinghai. July 1999. Recently Kun bzang 'gro 'dul bde chen rod rje's collected writings were published in Nang chen in eight volumes, the *mKhyen sprul kun bzang 'gro 'dul bde chen rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*.

one of the reincarnations of ’Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po (1820-1892), he is the founder of the dPal me mdo sngags bshad sgrub gling monastery located in Shar mda’ (Nang chen) and its associated mountain hermitage, the rDo rje mer chen dge dgon bkra shis chos gling on Mount rDza mer chen to the west of Shar mda’.[495] Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje particularly valued austere asceticism along with the practice of meditation, and he spent most of his time in retreat on the mountains in the southern areas of Nang chen where he performed most of his visionary revelations. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje met this teacher on various occasions over a few years until 1946, the year of his death. Spending various periods of time with him bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje received teachings and performed retreats under his supervision.

Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje included bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje in one of his prophecies. There we find lines that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje interprets as a declaration of his recognition as a Treasure revealer:

> The highest of O rgyan Padma’s spiritual sons
> Will appear like the sun cleansing the darkness of ignorance.
> Conqueror of all illusive visions by the power of the mind,
> By the mighty power of miracles,
> He will resist the border armies
> The one whose name is Badzra,
> Will pacify the evil era and whatever is related to it.
> Then, he will go among sentient beings and increase [their] happiness.
> Vanquishing the evil side,
> [He will thus wear] the Supreme Helmet of Sutras and Mantras.[496]

These prophetic lines obliquely refer to the full name of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje interprets the word *nyi ma* (sun) in the second line and *dorje* (*Badzra*=*Vajra*) in the sixth line as referring to himself through the analogy of the sun (*nyi ma*)/radiant light (*’od gsal*)

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[495] For a full account and detailed story of this ’Bri gung bKa’ brgyud monastery see “rDza mer chen dge dgon gyi gnas kyi che ba dang dgon sde phyag btab tshul sogs kyi byung ba brjod pa” in sGa karma (ed.), *Khams sgom sde nang chen pa’i dgon khag rnams kyi byung ba phyogs bsgrigs rin chen sgrom brgya ’byed ba’i deb ther gser gyi lde mig*, 1999, pp. 427-432. For a biography of Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje, see Tshogs gnyis rgya mtsho (1974).

[496] *o rgyan pad ma’i thugs kyi sras mchog ni/*
*ma rig mun sel nyi ma lta bur ’byung/*
*dgongs pa’i rtsal rdzogs gzhan snang zil gyi gnon/*
*rdzu ’phrul stobs mnga’ mtha’ yi dmag dpung zlog/*
*skyes bu badzra ming can ’byung ba des/*
*’brel tshad don ldan bskal ngan zhi bar ’gyur/*
*de tshe sems can bde skyid yar ’phel ’gro/*
*nag phyogs gzhom nas mdo sngags dbu ‘phangs mtho/*

From *Gu ru’i lung bstan shel dkar me long* (The Crystal Mirror: The Prophecies of the Guru), f.7a. In the short colophon to the brief text, a *dgongs gter* text, we read that it was written by Kun bzang pad ma ’gro ’dul rdo rje, one of Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje’s names, when he was twenty-one years old (1918?).

and Badzra (*vajra*)/*Dorje*. For bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje this also confirms the name that the fourth Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje gave him at mTshur phu a few years earlier. The phrase "conqueror of all illusive visions by the power of the mind" in the third line refers directly to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's ability as a *gter ston* and more specifically to his future as a revealer of mind Treasures. Finally, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje interprets the sentence "he will resist the border armies" in the fifth line as referring to one of his past lives, that of Lha rje kun dga' nyi ma. Kun dga' nyi ma was the personal physician and assistant to King Ge sar of gLing who accompanied him to many battles especially launched to drive back the hordes of enemies coming from the border areas outside Tibet. These mystical skills will turn out to be particularly useful later on during the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution.

Although bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje spent with Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje only the last few years of his life, the two forged a strong bond. The teacher appreciated his disciple and gave him teachings introducing him to the fundamentals of the Great Perfection (*rDzogs chen*). He predominantly focused his instructions on the *snying thig* tradition. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje also received the complete empowerment of the whole *Gu ru gsang ba zil mnon*, Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje's cycle of revealed esoteric teachings based on *rdzogs chen* and collected in three volumes. Additionally, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje studied other material authored by Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje such as the *rdzogs chen gser gyi zhun thig las snying po ye shes rab gsal*. In the following years bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje spent most of his time practicing these teachings in the retreats where he practiced meditation intensively. His dedication, talent, and spiritual achievements soon brought him fame in the areas of sKye rgu mdo and Nang chen. Villagers and herdsmen of the area paid him regular visits bringing offerings, asking for advice, and requesting the performance of divinations, ceremonies, and rites.

## *First Community: The Me 'bar monastery*

By the early 1950s, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's fame grew. His wisdom, spiritual achievements, and visionary activities attracted religious personalities, monks, and devotees from the areas of Nang chen and sKye rgu mdo and soon disciples began to gather around the Treasure revealer. The monasteries of Zur mang and dPal me, and other monastic communities of the area frequently asked him to assist their monastics in their spiritual pursuits with specific teachings

and instructions for aspirant retreatants. However, religious professionals were not the only ones interested in bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s qualities.

Urban people and herdsmen paid regular visits to bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje for religious needs, and local leaders and religious personalities used to ask for bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s spiritual advice and divinatory expertise. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje soon gained the sympathy and the patronage of a local chieftain (*dpon po*), rDzi la dpon,[497] who was a minor but influential leader in Nang chen. He became one of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s most assiduous devotees and soon offered him patronage and a parcel of land in ’Do yus mda’ some fifty kilometers west of sKye rgu mdo. There, on the slopes of the Me ’bar mountain offering a spectacular view of the Tshi chu (one of the Mekong feeder rivers), bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje chose to build his first hermitage, Me ’bar dgon, with the help of local villagers. Soon a small group of devotees and disciples began to gather around him and the first huts were built around the main assembly hall and residence of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje.[498]

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s community began rather informally. The charismatic figure first built a small home and thereafter a small circle of close pupils took up residence nearby. As the religious community grew primarily by word of mouth, disciples built modest one-room, stone, adobe, stacked earth, or wood residences in a haphazard manner in the area. Most of the hermitage buildings were supported by private funding and donated labor and materials. People from nearby peasant villages (wherever bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje stayed) helped build his retreat compounds by providing donations of food and financial support and by donating materials for the facilities and furniture in the cells and huts. Individuals were free to come and go as they pleased since the community prescribed no formal registration or affiliation process and students were not asked to follow any long-term curriculum beyond the practice and meditation inspired by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s teachings. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s religious practice and instruction were strict and intense and, combined with his predilection for isolation and retreat, such a environment was not conducive to the creation of a large resident community. Practitioners at his hermitages were predominantly monastics both monks and nuns coming from nearby monasteries. A prominent group of lay devotees and non-celibate practitioners has also been following him and visiting his retreat to ask for teachings and blessings. Every summer

[497] I have not been able to gather any information about rDzi la dpon.
[498] I visited the Me ’bar dgon site just above ’Do yus mda’ village in sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP) on two occasions, in 1999 and 2000. Only a few remains are nowadays left of the original small compound residence of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje.

throughout the 1950s at bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s Me ’bar hermitage hundreds of devotees, including nomads and villagers from the surrounding areas, gathered and spent days there to receive empowerment rituals, which included, among others, the “Removing all impediments for the Realization of Mind” (*thugs sgrub bar chad kun sel*). Encouraged and sponsored by a number of local aristocratic families, donors, and devotees, during these events bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and his community received all sorts of offerings and donations.[499]

In the mid 1950s, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje entered an isolated retreat in a cave on mount Chu lung mgon po near Zur mang area in Nang chen county in order to focus on the practice of *rta mgrin* (Hayagrīva). Although the scarcity of water made the area unsuitable for extended meditation retreats, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje had the sense that he should stay there to do his practices. While in meditation that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje had a vision of a *ḍākinī* speaking to him and giving him instructions. Following the *ḍākinī*’s order he dug a hole just at the base of the place he was sitting and water sprang out (*chu sgo*). Another oral account of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s deeds suggests that once while traveling through the Ge rong area near sKye rgu mdo in Khams, he left hand prints (*phyag rjes*) and foot prints (*zhabs rjes*) impressed on a rock.[500]

### *The Years at Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje’s chos sgar*

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life in Nang chen area was characterized by frequent mobility. He regularly traveled to Shar mda’ to pay visits to his teacher Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje. Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje passed away in 1946 but not before instructing his student to further his Tantric studies with another prestigious master of *rdzogs chen*. Following his teacher’s advice, a few years later in the mid 1950s, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje set out on a journey that took him to Go ’jo in Nyag rong south of sDe dge, where he met the charismatic master Nyag bla rig ’dzin byang chub rdo rje (henceforth Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje) who would have a deep influence on his religious career.

Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje suggested that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje study with this teacher for two reasons. Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje at that time was well known for his

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[499] bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s personal communication. Shar mda’, Nang chen (Yushu TAP), August 2005.
[500] bKra shis mtsho mo’s and bKra shis rgyal mtshan’s personal communications. rDza mer chen monastery, Shar mda’ Nang chen (Yushu TAP), July 2000.

achievements in *rdzogs chen* and for his sincerity and strictness in the transmission of the teachings. Moreover, his lifestyle was that of a householder, without any commitment to monastic life or formalized scholarship. Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje saw the opportunity for his disciple, also a nonmonastic, to enrich his experience by coming into contact with such a charismatic figure.

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje arrived at Nyag bla sgar, Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje's retreat center, in 1955, when he was thirty-five years old.[501] At the time he arrived at Nyag bla sgar, another religious practitioner was living at the religious complex who was later to become a well known Buddhist teacher, Chos rgyal Nam mkha'i nor bu (b.1938).[502] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje does not provide information about this Buddhist teacher and no information concerning a meeting between them or the period he spent at Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje's community is included in the DDZG. In fact, despite being there at the same time, the two disciples apparently never met.[503]

Originally from Nyag rong, Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje (?-c.1978),[504] the revealer of the *rGyal mo rong gi gnas chen dmu rdo*, lived most of his life in retreat in the remote area of Ra chu rka mdo near Go 'jo in Khams in present-day Chab mdo county.[505] There he established a self-supporting community and a religious encampment (*chos sgar*), or a "commune" using Nam

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[501] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. Ri phug kha hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 2000.

[502] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal communication. Both Chos rgyal Nam mkha' nor bu Rinpoche and bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje have lived and studied at Nyag bla sgar, Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje's community during the same period in the mid-1950s. According to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, his time at Nyag bla sgar overlapped with the presence of Nam mkha'i nor bu, although the two never seem to have met. In the summer of 1997 while I was in Lhasa, I had the chance to meet Nam mkha'i nor bu Rinpoche at his relatives' house in Zhol gsar pa, a neighborhood in the northern part of the city. gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his wife mKha' 'gro dPal chen lha mo accompanied me to visit him. On that occasion bKra shis rgyal mtshan told Nam mkha'i nor bu about his teacher and presented him with one of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revealed texts. When I asked nam mkha'i nor bu if he remembered to have met bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje while in Nyag bla sgar, Nam mkha' nor bu confirmed that he had heard of him while at Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje's *chos sgar* in 1955 when he was young. (Nam mkha'i nor bu's personal communication, Lhasa, July 1997).

[503] I have collected most of the information on this period of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life during interviews with him and a few people from his community.

[504] There is paucity of evidence concerning Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje's dates of birth and death. I have had no access to an original biographical source. For his date of birth TBRC offers c. 20th century. Nam mkha'i nor bu is the only scholar who has offered a specific date of birth and death in his *The Crystal and the Way of Light* (2000: 183): 1826 and 1978 respectively. These dates, however, are confusing because, if we rely on these dates, Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje would have lived one hundred and fifty years, and he would have also been much older than some of his teachers.

[505] *rGyal mo rong gi gnas chen dmu rdo* (*sBas yul rong bzhi'i nang tshan shar phyogs rgyal mo rong gi gnas chen dmu rdo g.yung drung spungs rtse la sogs ri bo drug cu'i dkar chag legs byung*, Chengdu, 1992). This is an important text describing the pilgrimage sites in rGyal mo rong especially around the sacred place of dMu rdo g.yung drung spungs rtse, Mount rGyal mo dmur rdo, in today's Rong brag county (Ch. Danba xian).

mkha'i nor bu's words, that later became known as Nyag bla sgar.[506] The resident population of Nyag bla sgar was a combination of monastics, non-celibate practitioners, and lay devotees.[507] Raised in a nonmonastic environment, Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje's approach to Buddhism was rather experiential and pragmatic, favoring an ecumenical position. His main teachers were Nyag bla rang rig rdo rje (1847-1903) and A 'dzoms 'brug pa 'gro 'dul dpa' bo (1842-1924), but he also studied with Nyag bla padma bdud 'dul (1816-1872)[508] and the well-known Bon po scholar Shar dza bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1859-1935). There is very limited literature in Tibetan or in Western languages on Nyag la byang chub rdo rje, who left a mark in the Buddhist history of Go 'jo. Nam mkha'i nor bu's anecdotal stories are the only available biographical information about this intriguing master.

When Nam mkha'i nor bu first met Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje in 1955, he was impressed by the frankness of the teacher's attitude. In his early autobiographical writing titled *The Crystal and the Way of the Light* he recalls:

> […] I had no doubt that this old man was to be my master, and right away on my first visit to his village, I became determined to remain there to receive teachings from him. His name was Changchub Dorje, and in terms of outward appearance he seemed like a normal country person of Tibet. His style of dress and his way of life were just completely normal on the surface. But […] his state of being was far from ordinary.
> The disciples who lived with him also lived their lives in a very ordinary way. Most of them were very simple people, not at all well-to-do, and they grew and tended crops, working the land and practicing together.
> Changchub Dorje was a *rdzogs chen* master, and *rdzogs chen* does not depend on externals; rather it is a teaching about the essentials of the human condition.[509]

Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje, whose name as a Treasure revealer was Khrag 'thung bdud 'dul hūm nag gling pa, was well known in Khams not only for his expertise in *rdzogs chen* teachings,

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[506] Nam mkha'i nor bu (1993: 157).

[507] See TBRC, TBRC Resource Code G596. bKra bshis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. Ri phug kha hermitage. Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai. August 2000.

[508] Nyag bla pad ma bdud 'dul ('Khrul zhig byang chub gling pa or Grub chen nyi zla kun mdzes 1816-1872) is one of the most famous practitioners and masters *rdzogs chen* of nineteenth-century Tibet. He has revealed the Treasure cycle (*gter skor*) *mKha' khyab rang grol* (The Universal self-Liberation). He was also master of a few other outstanding practitioners such as A 'dzoms 'brug pa 'gro 'dul dpa' bo rdo rje (1842-1924), who became a renowned *rdzogs chen* practitioner and teacher and an exponent of the non-sectarian (*ris med*) approach, and gTer ston bsod rgyal (Nyag bla gter ston bSod rgyal or gTer chen Las rab gling pa phrin las mtha' yas rtsal, 1856-1926). Nyag bla pad ma bdud 'dul is believed to have attained "rainbow body" (*'ja' lus*) in 1872. Regarding this, see Kapstein (2006). For a reference to the lamas of Nyag rong (Nyag[rong] bla[ma]), please refer to Aten Dogyaltshang's *Nyag rong gtam rgan ma, A Historical Oration from Khams: The Ancient Recitations of Nyag rong*, edited by Tashi Tsering. Dharamsala: Amnye Machen Institute, 1993.

[509] Norbu and Shane (2000: 28).

but also for his skills as a clairvoyant and traditional Tibetan physician.[510] At the time when bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and Nam mkha’i nor bu were living in the community in 1955 or 1956, Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje was still very active in the revelation of his mind Treasures. Nam mkha’i nor bu recalls:

> After I had been only a few days with Changchub Dorje, he asked me to take dictation from him. I knew that he could not read and write, and as I can write well enough, I naturally agreed to be of what service I could, without thinking too much of it. I would sit inside the house at a table, and through the one pane of a window made of four panes of horn I could both see and hear the master outside in the courtyard, where he was usually busy with his patients and disciples. In the middle of all the bustle of activity that surrounded him he would begin to dictate to me, without even a moment’s hesitation about what he was going to say. Then he would stop dictating, all the while carrying on with his work, while I finished writing down what he had said. When I was done, I would call out that I’d finished. […] this is in fact exactly the way in which ‘Gongter’ [mind terma] always manifests. Over the next weeks we completed a big volume working in this way, and I later saw some of the other twenty such volumes that that had been similarly dictated to his other disciples.[511]

At Nyag bla sgar, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje received empowerments and instructions for many practices from Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje’s Treasure teachings and practiced them in strict retreat in the caves around the religious encampment. During this time, following his teacher’s advice and prophecy, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje retrieved a number of earth Treasures (*sa gter*) while meditating in retreat not far from Nyag bla sgar.

For bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje was more than a teacher; he was a model to whom he looked for inspiration. The organization and structure that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje adopted later on for his own community was most likely inspired by the community of Nyag bla sgar. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s activities as physician, Tantric expert, and Treasure revealer share a lot with Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje’s style. They were both well-versed in the performances of rituals and ceremonies and emphasized contemplation, oral transmission, and pith instructions rather than intellectual scholasticism.

Nam mkha’i nor bu offers more insights about his teacher Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje:

> When I went to my master Changchub Dorje, I was educated up to the hilt in the intellectual sense. My mind was filled with everything I’d learned in the monastic colleges. I thought that to receive

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[510] An interesting collection of ancient medical material (*sman yig*) has been recently published in Chengdu. This is the *mKhyen brtse’i dbang po’i sman yig dang bla ma zab don snying thig las ’gro ba’i srog ’dzin bud rtsi’i char rgyun* originally composed by ’Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po (1828-1892) and rearranged by Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje (Chengdu, 2003). See TBRC, Work RID: W27498.
[511] Norbu and Shane (2000: 140-141).

> transmission of the teachings, elaborate ritual initiations were essential and I asked Changchub Dorje to give me a certain initiation. I asked every day for days and days, but he always refused.
> ‘What’s the use?’ he’d say. ‘You’ve already received so many of those initiations from your other masters; initiations are not the principle of Dzogchen teachings. Transmission isn’t only received in formal initiations’.
> But no matter what he said, I remained fixed on the kind of perfectly performed ritual initiations other masters had always given me. I wasn’t satisfied with his replies, and I wanted him to put on a special hat, prepare a mandala, and pour a little water on my head, or something like that. That was what I really, sincerely wanted; but he always continued to refuse. […]
> Then, without interruption, for about three or four hours, Changchub Dorje gave me a real explanation of Dzogchen, not teaching me in an intellectual style, but talking to me in a very straightforward and relaxed, friendly, conversational way. Despite all my education, this was the first time a master had made such a direct attempt to get me to understand something. What he said, and the way that he said it, was exactly like a tantra of Dzogchen, spoken spontaneously, continuously aloud, and I knew that even a very learned scholar would not be able to speak like that. Changchub Dorje was speaking from clarity and not from an intellectual understanding.
> From that day I understood that intellectual study, which had always previously been so important to me, is only of secondary value. And I understood that the principle of transmission is not just the performance of rituals or initiations, or the giving of intellectual explanations. That day my mental constructions completely collapsed. Up until then I was completely boxed in with all the ideas I had received in my college education.[512]

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje records that due to his assiduous practice of the cycles of “wrathful mantras” (*drag sngags skor*), he became famed by the name of Nus ldan rdo rje (Powerful Vajra) that was given to him by his first teacher bKra shis chos ’phel. However, just like the Sixteenth Karma pa Rang ’byung rig pa’i rdo rje did a few years earlier, Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje too gave him a religious name (*chos ming*): ’Od gsal rdo rje. His religious names were given to him as they were prophesied in connection with his future development as a Treasure revealer by both teachers.[513]

## *Visions, Treasures, and Other Arcane Claims*

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s career as a Treasure revealer had been announced by a number of prophetic Treasure scriptures (*gter lung*) and other religious personalities. He recalls:

[512] Norbu and Shane (2000: 35-38).

[513] “Because I practiced the cycles of wrathful mantras that were transmitted to me, everybody called me by the name of Nus ldan rdo rje (Powerful Vajra). As for [the origin of] the names bDe chen rdo rje (Blissful Vajra) and ’Od gsal rdo rje (Luminous Vajra), these are related to the transmission of the profound Treasures (*zab gter bka’ bab*). The Sixteenth Karma pa [Rang ’byung] Rig pa’i rdo rje and my teacher gTer chen Byang chub rdo rje from Nyag rong gave these names to me [as a result of] their predictions. It is as a consequence of these predictions that everyone would know me [by these names]. NTPB (1999: lines 29-33).

> First of all, as for the teachers who have uttered prophetic gter ma scriptures (*gter lung*), at first there are the second reincarnation of ’Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse, dBang phyug Kun bzang ’gro ’dul bde chen rdo rje,[514] and Nyag bla gter chen hūm nag gling pa, also known as Byang chub rdo rje. [Then there are also] mTshan nyid ’jam dpal nor bu, alias mTshan nyid bsod nams bstan ’dzin and a monk from Khams whose name is Don rgyud nyi ma. Relying on the many prophecies expressed by these teachers, from the age of twenty-four [1945?] I have [revealed] a great number of earth Treasures (*sa gter*), mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*), and pure visions (*dag snang*). Since some basic ones among them deal with the general tradition of the Teachings, with the passage of time they will be beneficial to a great number of beings. However, due to past aspirations and the energy of Gu ru [rin po che], [many Treasures] still reside in the hands of the Treasure masters. Moreover, although I received many [written] prophecies by the Karma pa Rig pa’i rdo rje, the dGe lugs lama Phu cog byams pa, the Sa skya lama ’Khri chen rin po che, and Gung pa bKra shis chos ’phel, these have been taken away by the Chinese.[515]

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s teachers’ prophecies regarding his meditative achievements, religious career, and their comments about his visions announcing his role as Treasure revealer were pivotal in his notion of self. These prophecies include statements such as “Then, he shall go to spread happiness among the sentient beings” (*de tshe sems can bde skyid yar ’phel ’gro*),[516] and “I received prophecies according to which I would become the curative medicine to both Teachings and living beings in the future” (*ma ’ongs bstan ’gro gso sman ’byung ’gyur gyi lung yang mang du thob*).[517] They substantiate bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s understanding of his connection with other human beings who would benefit from his deeds as well as sanction a link between bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and his teachers. In his NTPB, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje writes:

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[514] Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje.

[515] *dang po gter lung gnang mkhan bla ma mang lags kyang/ thog mar ’jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i sku ’phreng gnyis pa grub pa’i dbang phyug kun bzang ’gro ’dul bde chen rdo rje dang nyag bla gter chen hūm nag gling pa’am byang chub rdoe [= rdo rje] gnyis/ mtshan nyid ’jam dpal nor bu’am mtshan nyid bsod nams bstan ’dzin khams pa sku gshog[s] mtshan don rgyud nyi ma zhes pa’i bla ma gong de rnams kyis rang lo nyer bzhi’i dus nas gter lung zin pa’i gnang zhus rgya chen yod pa la brten nas sa gter dgongs gter dag snang sogs rgya cher yod kyang/ rtsa ba tsam gyi gter kha ’ga’ re bstan pa’i srol phyir bzhugs pa las/ dus dbang gyi rgya chen ’gro don zhud [=zhus] kyang sngon smon dang gu ru’i byin rlabs gter bdag bskul ma bcas ma ldog rtsam du bzhugs pa lags so/ gzhan yang karma pa rig pa’i rdoe [= rdo rje] dge lugs bla ma phu cog byams pa sa skya’i bla ma ‘khri chen rin po che gung pa bkra shis chos ’phel sogs kyis lung rten[= bstan] mang po’i yi ge yod kyang rgya yis ’phrog song//*
bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s oral communication, 05/08/1999. For the complete text, see Text 4 in Appendix.

[516] From *Gu ru’i lung bstan shel dkar me long* (The Crystal Mirror: The Guru’s Prophecies, f.7a), a *gter ma* revealed by Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje.

[517] See Text 1 NTPB (1999: lines 32-33).

> Sa skya gong ma Khri chen and other hierarchs of the Phun tshogs pho brang, and also Kar sras kong sprul, blowing the magic wind of the Vajra word into my mind, predicted that I would become the curative medicine for both Teachings and living beings.[518]

More than foretelling bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's future, these prophecies authorized him to act according to the way his predecessors did. It was, in short, an official recognition of these qualities that authorized him to engage as a teacher and a Treasure revealer.

During his early career as Treasure revealer bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje retrieved many Treasure objects that apparently included "yellow scrolls" (*shog gser*).[519] Only a few, however, survived the Cultural Revolution. In a short passage he describes some of the Treasures he discovered and also religious personalities who were influential in his career as a Treasure revealer and whom he met during his life and studied with during his pilgrimages across Eastern and Central Tibet in the late 1930s and 1940s. He writes:

> I received incomparable Treasures and precious stones such as earth Treasures colored with the Five Precious Things, a turquoise stone with [the effigy of] rGyal mo (dPal ldan lha mo). Nowadays a small portion of those can still be seen. There were also more Treasures items such as a Heruka phurba that appeared from the 'Od 'bar rock. From mKha' 'gro 'bum rDzong (Fortress of One Hundred Thousand *Ḍākinīs*), [I retrieved] the *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa'i zab gter*.[520] From a rock at rDzing rgyal [I retrieved] a Treasure vase of immortality. At mount gNas chen Padma shel [I retrieved] a Treasure chest [full] of religious medicines of Nectar for the Liberation through Taste and many other fabulous Treasure items, which, being a great number, I will not enumerate herein.
>
> During the troubles in the three regions of Tibet, I saved Treasures and [other] items that had been spared destruction.[521] [...]

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[518] NTPB (1999: lines 21-26). Kar sras kong sprul, 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse 'od zer or 'Jam mgon dpal ldan mkhyen brtse 'od zer (1904-1953), the reincarnation of 'Jam mgon kong sprul the First, who was born as the son of mKha' kyab rdo rje, the fifteenth Karma pa.

[519] While staying at gNas chen padma mthong grol mountain hermitage many of my informants, including bKra shis mtsho mo, bKra shis rgyal mtshan, and Tshe bzang bsam gtan gling rin po che, told me that most material Treasures that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje retrieved in his early years were stored at the dGa' ldan monastery and with his friend and patron Phrin las kun khyab, but they were all destroyed or lost during the Cultural Revolution.

[520] One of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's cycles of revealed Treasure teachings (*gter skor*).

[521] According to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's explanation, here the term *rgud pa*, "trouble" refers to the Cultural Revolution which devastated all Tibetan regions. *Bod yul sde gsum* refers to the three main regions in which the entire Tibetan geographical and ethnic area was traditionally divided before 1959, mDo khams, dBus gtsang, and mNga' ris skor gsum. During the massive violence and destruction that characterized the Cultural Revolution, temples were destroyed and teachers were objects of verbal and physical abuse. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje also fell victim to many such abuses. Most of the earth Treasure items that were held at his residence and retreat centers were inevitably destroyed or taken by the Red Guards. Only a few of them have been saved and exist today. The collection of items bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje retrieved in his life are classical religious artefacts largely used in tantric rites and ceremonies such as *vajras*, *dril bu* bells, *phur pas*, statues of various sizes, precious and semi-precious stones characterized by spontaneously or self-produced images on their surfaces, a few yellow scroll texts (*shog gser*), and unopened *gter* "caskets." The actual number of remaining items is limited to a half-dozen articles, which are in his possession.

The productions of such virtuous deeds (*rnam dkar bya ba*) with the profound power of previous aspirations are the result of the efforts in a complete practice. sMin pa mKhyen sprul bde chen gling pa said:[522]

> 'Padmasambhava, the Second Buddha, at the time when he propagated, like a vision, the Teachings in Tibet, summoned the great saint dPal gyi Seng ge as the first [disciple] in his community. Born in the Ngan pa family, he expressed the aspiration of being of great benefit to the Teachings and human being of the future.'

Many high personalities such as the great scholar and realized being 'Jam dpal nor bu and the Khams pa monk Don gyud nyi ma, among many others, have pronounced prophecies about me such as that I am the reincarnation[523] of the one called Kun dga' nyi ma who at the time of [Ge sar of] gLing was the assistant to the Great Lion. Later I was reborn as Bya med lha chog, a disciple of 'Gro mgon ye pa chen po.[524]

Details such as those above drawn from prophecies and visions are essential for a Tibetan Buddhist professional like bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje as they contribute to his curriculum and reinforce the sense of his religious identity. The arcane world of prophecies, revelations, and visions unfolded before the young bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje since the early encounters with his two prominent teachers: Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje and Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje.

When bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje writes that "Nowadays a small portion of those can be still seen," in the passage above, he refers to the fact that he offered some of his revealed Treasure to devotees and donors of the area.[525] A Treasure revealer's donation of his material Treasures to his devotees illustrates the interchange between the Treasure revealer and the individuals who support him. It also epitomizes the Treasure revealer's need for witnesses of his achievements and powers. In the specific case of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje as for other Treasure revealers, the donation of his precious Treasures represent an expression of appreciation for his followers' loyalty and support as well as a gesture cementing the connections (*rten 'brel*) that favored the revelation.[526]

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's earth Treasure retrievals and visionary revelations began to take place soon after he met these two influential figures. Some of his earth Treasures revelations were apparently witnessed publicly (*khrom gter*) while others took place privately while he was

[522] dPal me mkhyen brtse Kun bzang 'gro 'dul also know as Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje (1897-1946), is often referred to in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's writings by his short name bDe chen rdo rje.
[523] Tib. *lus rten*, literally "bodily support."
[524] NTPB, Text 1 (1999: 39-79).
[525] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. gNas chen padma mthong grol hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP), Qinghai. August 1999.
[526] For another Treasure revealer's donation of Treasure items to followers and disciples see Jacoby (2007: 51).

in meditation retreat.[527] Some of his revelations of sacred objects are said to have been observed publicly by crowds of devotees gathered for the occasion. While bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje has guarded a number of his material Treasures, he often donated some of his sacred Treasures to the temples and monasteries of the areas where he performed the discovery.[528] A number of revelations were accompanied by the performance of other supernatural skills such as leaving hand prints (*phyag rjes*) and foot prints (*zhabs rjes*) on rocks. These, like other miraculous deeds are often considered central to a Treasure revealer’s career since they help to promote the Treasure revealer’s credibility and contribute to the assertion of his power over natural phenomena.[529]

The opening of a Treasure place (*gter gnas*, *gter kha*) is often followed by other equally important actions meant to maintain the sacrality of the event and the power of the sacred place. Having vowed to preserve the significance of a religious site, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje would often leave a “replacement Treasure” or “substitute Treasure” (*gter tshab*) in the crack from where the original *gter ma* was extracted. These actions are central to a Treasure revealer’s ability to maintain a connection with the land of Tibet and his ability to personally create a religious landscape with spiritual control over geographical areas, to mediate between ethereal forces (the local deities and protective gods of the land) and the recipients of the spiritual transmission, and to establish new religious sites. I call such a phenomenon “the ecology of revelation,” and argue that this is a fundamental socio-religious ethic among most Treasure revealers that represents respect for the environment and awareness of humans’ connection to the Tibetan land, which in turn fuels a sense of nationalism among devotees.

But how did bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje realize he was a Treasure revealer? In bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s world his religious path that includes retreats, meditations, contemplations but also pilgrimage, meeting other teachers and receiving several teachings, and his visionary activities seem to run on parallel trajectories. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje expresses the sentiment of renouncing worldly existence many times in his writings. Despite the successful results that he achieved, during the strict schedules of meditative retreats he had to strive to abandon delusions and again liberations. The overriding theme here is, as Gyatso has aptly described, that “the

[527] bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s oral communication. Ri phug kha hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma. sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 2000.
[528] bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s oral communictaion. gNas chen padma mthong grol hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma. sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 1999.
[529] bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje has left a number of hand-prints (*phyag rjes*) in the Ge rong area of Qinghai Province of the PRC.

performance of the right kinds of meditations, ritual, and philosophical contemplation can effect radical personal change."[530]

According to the Tibetan tradition, the mind Treasures that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has revealed in the form of rituals, contemplative practices, esoteric instructions, and liturgical manuals are reaffirmations and revalidations of ancient material which has been, until now, stored for the benefit of human beings of the present. A Treasure revealer's (and therefore bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's) mission is to act as a mediator, a receiver, and an interpreter of his visionary material and offer it to his devotees and the community of practitioners. Throughout his life bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje experienced intense personal change and development. He has constantly adhered to contemplative practices and meditation retreats which form the core practice for the realization of selflessness. As Gyatso observes, "the very disciplines that induce a realization of the emptiness of the self, simultaneously produce an interiorized subjectivity."[531] In the traditions that have most influenced bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, Vajrayāna Buddhism and Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*), the realizations of both emptiness and subjectivity instigate self-transformation and empowerment. In the DDZG bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje writes:

> Then exemplary persons (*dam pa'i skyes rnams*) and scholars (*mig ldan bus*) from the great lands of Nepal, Tibet, and Khams, praised me and proclaimed me as Padma[sambhava]'s messenger (*padma'i pho nya*). [After that] I retrieved many treasures (*gter kha*) in the form of religious items and substances (*chos nor rdzas*).[532]

According to the DDZG, the beginning of these visionary revelations and Treasure retrievals coincided with the acclamation of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje as a "assistant" or "messenger" (*pho nya*) of Padmasambhava by many of the teachers he met in his journeys. The term *pho nya* is central to the tradition of Treasure revelation for it expresses the significant role that these figures are believed to play in the tradition as direct messengers of Padmasambhava's teachings diffused during his stay in Tibet.

Such statements are pivotal in confirming the Treasure revealer's credibility and his claims of miraculous powers. In the Treasure tradition it is particularly important to receive

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[530] Gyatso (1998:184).
[531] Gyatso (1998:184).
[532] *de nas bal bod khams phyogs yul ljongs che'i/*
*dam pa'i skyes rnams dang mig ldan bus/*
*pad ma'i pho nya bsngags brjod spyi bor bskul/*
*chos nor rdzas kyi gter kha sna tshogs drangs/* DDZG, f.7b.

authentication and recognition of one's achievements by other teachers and publicly renowned Buddhist leaders. This recognition is an important component of the DDZG as it foretells and makes possible of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's career as a Treasure revealer.

As we have seen already, in his youth bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje experienced intense visions of Padmasambhava, which announced a special connection with the renowned Indian master and a potential career as a visionary. Soon after he set off on his journey and began exerting in Buddhist practice, he had more visionary experiences that confirmed such a development in his life. It was, therefore, when bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje was still a young child that he first made acquaintance with his future role as a Treasure revealer. In 1927, when he was six or seven years old, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje (at that time 'Jigs med tshe ring) began to have visionary experiences of Padmasambhava and other central figures associated with dynastic Tibet and the early dissemination of Buddhism in the land.

A few years later, in approximately 1934, when he was a teenager, he left his teacher bKra shis chos 'phel's house. On his way to Lhasa to make prostrations and offerings to the statue of Jo bo Śākyamuni, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje had other visionary experiences that confirmed his early knowledge of the *gter byang*, the list of Treasures he was meant to reveal in his life. He recalls:

> It was when I was a young boy, about six or seven years-old that I understood that there were Treasure-related matters for me. Shortly later, when I was a little bit older on my way to Lhasa on pilgrimage doing prostrations, I met the Karma-Finding ḍākinī (Las brnyes kyi mkha' 'gro ma) and she explained to me 'There is some Treasure work (*gter gyi bya ba*) for the two of us!'[533]

Beside these early visionary encounters that introduced him to the world of revelation, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's appointment as *gter ston* was first announced by the master mTshan nyid bsod bstan rin po che.[534] An episode took place in central Tibet at Rwa sgreng in the late 1940s on another long pilgrimage to central Tibet when he was around twenty-eight years old that marks one of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's early public endorsements as a *gter ston*. During a visit to Rwa sgreng monastery,[535] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje met Bla ma mTshan nyid bsod bstan rin po

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[533] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. rDza mer chen monastery, Shar mda', Nang chen (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 2001.

[534] mTshan nyid 'jam dpal nor bu or 'Jam dpal nor bu pad ma dbang rgyal also known as rDza stod mtshan nyid sprul sku 'jam dpal nor bu (1892-1960).

[535] Rwa sgreng monastery was originally established as a bKa' gdams pa hermitage in the eleventh century by 'Brom ston pa rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1005-1064), one of the great Indian master Atiśa's first disciples. After the

che, whom he claims was Rwa sgreng rin po che's son.[536] It was on that occasion that, in front of a high reincarnate *bla ma*, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje publicly revealed a Treasure teaching. Impressed by such an event, mTshan nyid bsod bstan rin po che declared "You are a *gter ston* indeed!" and thus conferred on him the authority of a Treasure revealer.[537]

Three religious figures primarily provided bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje with prophetic statements, laudatory remarks, and encouragement to reveal *gter ma*: the Sixteenth Karma pa Rang 'byung rig pa'i rdo rje, Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje, and Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje. Through the power of their clairvoyance these three masters decreed that he would reveal Treasures in great number in the future including earth and mind Treasures. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje recalls that some masters recognized his position as a *gter ston* in written format such as letters (*phyag bris*). Among these were the Sixteenth Karma pa Rang 'byung rig pa'i rdo rje, Zlu lding mkhan chen, a renowned Sa skya master, and more recently Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, whom bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje refers to as A chos mkhan po, and the fourth mChog gling rin po che of rTsi ke near Nang chen.[538]

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revelations, like most Treasure revealers' *gter ma*, revolve around a twofold classification of minor Treasures (*gter phran*) and major Treasures (*gter chen*). Although the blessing power of all material Treasures is usually considered of the same quality, it seems to me that for bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and bKra shis rgyal mtshan the retrieval of

seventh Dalai Lama, bsKal bzang rgya mtsho (1708-57) enthroned his own teacher Ngag dbang mchog ldan as the dGa' ldan khri pa in 1738, Rwa sgreng later on developed into a formal monastery belonging to the dGe lugs pa tradition. In addition to that, Rwa sgreng monastery became also the seat of a lineage of incarnate *bla ma*s appointed as regents of Tibet.

[536] According to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's account, mTshad nyid bsod nams bstan 'dzin was also known by the name of mTshan nyid 'jam dpal nor bu and he was the son of the Fifth Rwa sgreng Rin po che (Rwa sgreng rgyal po, or "King of Rwa sgreng", as bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje puts it) named Thub bstan 'jam dpal ye shes bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1912-1947). bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje most probably met mTshad nyid bsod nams bstan 'dzin at Rwa sgreng in the late 1930s or early 1940s when rNying ma *bla ma*s were often invited by Rwa sgreng Rin po che to the court to perform rituals and ceremonies. Among these, for instance, was Bya bral sangs rgyas rdo rje rin po che (b. 1913), who was invited by the Rwa sgreng regent to Lhasa to give transmissions and instructions on *rDzogs chen*. It is difficult, however, to assess some of the details received from oral traditions about Rwa sgreng rin po che's life since his presence and role in Tibetan politics is one of the darkest aspects of Tibet's modern history. Accompanied by the necessary visions and auspicious signs crucial for the discovery of the new Dalai Lama, Rwa sgren Rin po che, as regent of Tibet (*rgyal tshab*), supervised the discovery and the reception of the newly appointed Dalai Lama in Lhasa in 1939 and acted as ruler of the country until his resignment in 1941, when his successor sTag brag rin po che took the office. Accused later on of organizing a *coup d'état* in 1947, the ex-regent Rwa sgreng rin po che was jailed in Lhasa and his properties confiscated. Many believe he was murdered in prison that same year. Dhondup (1986: 92-122). I express my gratitude to Matthew Akester for having shared with me his knowledge on this topic and pointing me towards pertinent literature.

[537] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. rDza mer chen monastery, Shar mda' Nang chen (Yushu TAP), August 2001.

[538] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. rDza mer chen monastery, Shar mda' Nang chen (Yushu TAP), August 2001.

material Treasure artifacts and the visionary revelation of Treasures scriptures determine different phases in a Treasure revealer's career where mind Treasures abound with the practitioner's advancement along the Buddhist practice.[539] In one of his retreat sojourns at Nyag bla sgar in the early 1960s, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje retrieved a number of material objects that gave him fame as a Treasure revealer. In the meditation cave where he was living in the vicinity of Nyag bla sgar, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje once discovered a large turquoise Treasure (*g.yu gter*) with prints on it attributed to Padmasambhava. Apparently, in the same occasion, he also revealed the first set of Tantric practices (*grub thabs*; Skt. *sādhana*) that would later constitute his principal cycles of revelations. This is the Treasure cycle associated with *rta mgrin rdo rje me char*, a manifestation of the deity Hayagrīva. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje documents Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje's assessment of this initial period of his revelation in the DDZG:

> When the time was proper, I performed every action and [the treasure teachings] were diffused.
> In particular, prince Mu rub btsan po's
> Emanation, the great Treasure revealer Nyag bla Byang chub rdo rje,
> Gave me initiation into the dynamic energy of awareness.
> Illuminating, like the sun and the moon,
> The symbolic transmission has been given to many lineage holders
> For the immense benefit of the living beings.
> This originates from the transmissions of Padmasambhava from O rgyan.
> Encouraging me with [actions] mentioned above, he [then] conferred great authority on me.
> This was the prophecy praising the request for Teachings.
> Afterwards I sought many Treasure items from Treasure openings,
> Such as big Treasures and small Treasures."[540]

Although bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje began revealing his cycles of Treasures in the 1960s, he completed his revelations only recently. He apparently succeeded in revealing all the earth Treasures included in his Treasure registry (*gter byang*) as announced in his early visions.

> Most of the earth Treasures (*sa gter*) were in the ground, [just as announced] in the Teacher's divine prophecy. This was the case also for the way I would retrieve them. All the mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*) sprang out without any effort (*rtsol med*) from the space of the mind. When the mind Treasures would spring out I would recognize everything such as color of the deity, its hand *mudra*, and the ornaments (*rgyan cha*) so that I could write down all this. The earth Treasures were realized just according to the prophecies."[541]

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[539] gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. August 2000.
[540] DDZG (1998: 8b-9a).
[541] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. rDza mer chen monastery, Shar mda', Nang chen (Yushu TAP), August 2001.

However, occasionally unfavorable circumstances occurred that caused bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje not to be able to reveal Treasures. For instance, a few revelations did not take place correctly due to obstacles attributed to demons (*’dre*) or were delayed because the proper time elapsed (*gter len pa’i dus tshod yol*). This occurred especially during the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution.[542]

## *More Visions in a Rural Brigade during the Cultural Revolution*

When Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in China in 1966, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje lived in meditation retreat in the vicinity of Nyag bla sgar, a place he would visit occasionally. The movement of revolutionary ideology and criticism spread quickly to the furthest reaches of Tibet. Trapped within the chaotic web of the Cultural Revolution, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje too was doomed to spend the following several years in the hands of revolutionary cadres, who were often his own fellow villagers.

At the time when the policy against Buddhism and religious practice intensified in Tibet, the whole religious texture in China was already changing due to the widespread socialist education campaigns launched in the years between 1963 and 1965. Chinese leaders made efforts to discourage superstition (Ch. *mixin*), and they targeted not only religious professionals but also the religious practices themselves and the lay devotees who followed them. By 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (Ch. *wenhua dagemin*) launched by Mao Zedong, the leaders’ dismay at their failure to use their patronage of Buddhism to control Tibet resulted in two major “falls from grace” for Tibetan religious leaders. In 1962, the Tenth Paṇ chen bla ma blo bzang phrin las lhun grub chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1938-1989) was criticized and attacked for a petition he wrote and presented on the situation in Tibet and in 1967 he was arrested and persecuted. In 1966 another religious leader dGe bshes Shes rab rgya mtsho (1884-1968), an influential Tibetan scholar who acted as the vice-governor of the Qinghai Province from 1949 to

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*sa gter phal cher la bla ma lha yi lung bstan te/ sa de lta bu ru gter de yod/ len pa’i thabs de lta bu gyi zhes gsung song/ dgongs gter thams cad dgongs pa’i klong pas rtsol med du bstol song/ dgongs gter bstol ba’i skabs lha yi sku mdog / phyag mtshan/ rgyan cha lugs thams cad shes la/ shes pa de yig thog ru bris shes pa byung song/ sa gter yin na lung bstan pa ltar byas pas ’grub song//*

[542] bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s oral communication. rDza mer chen monastery, Shar mda’, Nang chen (Yushu TAP), August 2001.

1964, was dismissed from his position as Chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association (1955-1964).[543] As Welch notes in his study of the practice of Buddhism in Mao's China,

> Yet the more important reason for a change in the policy toward Buddhism was domestic. It was part of a change in the policy towards religion in general which in turn, was part of the socialist education campaign. This campaign resulted mainly from Mao Tse-tung's increasing discontent with the embourgeoisement of the bureaucracy and the lack of revolutionary fervor among the youth, but he must also have been discontented with the persistence of superstitious beliefs and activities. That would explain the efforts that began in 1963 to suppress "religious superstition."[544]

As a follow up to the campaign to suppress superstition and superstitious activities, the early phase of the Cultural Revolution was meant to annihilate the "four olds" (Ch. *si jiu*), old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits, which according to the Chinese communist ideologists were at the origin of the country's backwardness.[545] Buddhism was an obvious target and virtually all influential Buddhist monastics were forced to express "self-criticism" and denounce their feudal and superstitious behavior, disrobe, let their hair grow, eat meat, get married, and become productive members of society.[546]

The story of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's vicissitudes during the Cultural Revolution is reminiscent of that of many Tibetan personalities of that time. Reached by teams of Red Guards (Ch. *hong weibing*) who were patrolling the area, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje was forced to leave the cave where he was living in retreat and was taken to a prison in Chab mdo. There he was publicly accused of being a counter-revolutionary, an exploiter of people's minds, and a trickster disseminating superstitions and false claims. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje was dragged into violent "struggle sessions" (*'thab 'dzing*; Ch. *zhengtou*) where he was physically and verbally abused by many of his fellow countrymen intoxicated by Maoist ideology.[547] Religious figures and other individuals who were leaders within the traditional society were condemned for their support of a feudalist society and, therefore, typically criticized for being "class enemies."

In about 1967, when bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje was about forty-six years old, he was transferred to the town of Chab mdo where he spent a few months in the local prison before

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[543] For a short biographical outline of dGe bshes shes rab rgya mtsho (also known as rDo sbis/dbyi Shes rab rgya mtsho 'jam dpal dgyes pa'i blo gros), see Stoddard (1985b), and Gray (2005: 200-212).
[544] Welch (1972: 356).
[545] Welch (1972: 341).
[546] Welch (1972: 346).
[547] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. gNas chen padma hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 1998. For an account of the suppression of Chinese Buddhist leaders and figures under Mao's regime, see Welch (1972: 231-66).

being moved further to another prison in Xining (Qinghai) where he served a few months sentence until the following year. After the jail experience in Xining, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje was taken by the Red Guards to the countryside to carry out hard labor. There he was assigned to reeducation through forced labor in a People's commune (Ch. *renmin gongshe*) located at dGa' ldan monastery (not far from Zur mang and Rag smad monasteries) in kLung shis county of the sKye rgu mdo prefecture. As part of his reeducation, study of Marxist and Maoist ideology was made extremely difficult for everyone, including bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. He suffered insults and long interrogation sessions where his religious faith was questioned and his beliefs ridiculed.[548] Additionally, like other fellow prisoners, he was forced to do hard labor. Some specific tasks included manual work such as logging and collecting manure around the village. He worked for nearly two years at this commune before being transferred to work at a small production brigade (*las don ru khag*; Ch. *gongzuodui*) in 'Be nang, a remote rural area Southwest of sKye rgu mdo.

The diet was poor and because of malnutrition many elderly people had serious health problems, and a number died in 'Be nang while bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje was there. For a short time bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje was chosen to cook and although he secretly attempted to improve the meager daily rations, there was not much he could do. The daily fare consisted of rice and bread and only occasionally *tsam pa*, the Tibetan staple food. Vegetables were rare and meat was scarce.[549]

Despite the harsh conditions, while engaging in hard manual work and forced to cook at the production brigade, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje never betrayed his devotion and commitments towards the practice and diffusion of the Buddhist doctrine. On various occasions bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje experienced powerful visions that reconnected him with his past life as sMan pa Kun dga' nyi ma, the assistant and personal physician in the service of King Ge sar of gling.[550] As we

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[548] Labor reform (Ch. *laogai*) and labor reeducation (Ch. *laojiao*) camps have been one of the most frequent forms of political reeducation in the PRC (see Seymour and Anderson 1998: viii; 18-20). The *laogai* system was also particularly intense during the years of the Cultural Revolution when religious personalities of various ranks and all religious believers inevitably suffered severe persecution. Struggle sessions, beatings, torture, solitary confinement, and forced labor were widely practiced in all regions of the PRC. For a general overview of *laogai* conditions, see Seymour and Anderson (1998: 87-92).

[549] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. gNas chen padma hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 1998.

[550] Well-known feats are attributed to Kun dga' nyi ma by popular and legendary folktales. Tradition has it that his devotion to Ge sar of gLing inspired him to join many battles to defend the soil of Tibet. Kun dga' nyi ma, the physician, appears in many popular songs dedicated to King Ge sar. Activities associated with Lha rje Kun dga' nyi ma are to be found in various popular epic songs (*sgrung*) dedicated to gLing Ge sar, such as, for instance, the *rTa*

read earlier in this chapter, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s connection with Ge sar was announced by several Buddhist masters. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje recalls:

> Many great masters, among whom mKhas mchog grub brnyes ’Jam dpal nor bu and the Khampa monk Don rgyud nyi ma, prophesied that I am the reincarnation of many past lives such as the one called Kun dga’ nyi ma, who was an attendant of the Great Lion [Ge sar], at the time of gLing, and later on I was also a reincarnation of Bya me lha mchog, disciple of ‘Gro mgon ye pa chen po.[551]

The connection between bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and King Ge sar of gLing has played a major in shaping his sense of religious identity. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the figure of Ge sar of gLing has a role within Treasure revelation activities. In this regard, Germano has recently touched upon the issue when specifically dealing with the revitalization of the Tibetan past in the movements related to Treasure discovery in China. According to him:

> King Gesar is famed for his prowess as a warrior and reputed to be an incarnation of Tibet’s patron bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Because a vast cycle of epic poetry and mythology has been woven around King Gesar over the intervening centuries, he has assumed a mythic status perhaps analogous to that of England’s King Arthur, and in eastern Tibet he has also assumed an importance in the normative religious traditions as prominent lamas have composed rituals and meditations centering on him. Such

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*rgyug skyid kyi nyi ma* (Nyi ma and the Happy Horse Race Festival), and *gDug pa spun bdun* (The Seven Bad Brothers), which are among the most popular in Eastern Tibet. The following passage taken from the *gDug pa spun bdun* is dedicated to introducing Kun dga’ nyi ma:

*dmar gsal rgyan gos kha dog legs/*
*skra lcang lo’i zar bu dar snas brgyan/*
*shin tu bag ldan bshes bnyen tshul/*
*phyi nang bzang ’dzoms bshes gnyen can/*
*sman pa kun dga’ nyi ma red/*
*dus min ’chi skyon zlog mi red/*
*lha rta ngang pa ’dzum can red/*

The one who wears red shiny garments and ornaments beautifully colored
And a tuft of hair held by colored ribbons,
A pious man very modest,
A pious man, attractive and virtuous.
This is the physician Kun dga’ nyi ma.
The man who will counteract death and illness if premature,
And his divine horse has a smile [as broad as that] of a goose.
This is an excerpt taken from *gDug pa spun bdun*, Xizang shehui kexueyuan, Xizang Renmin Chubanshe, Lhasa 1993, pp. 34-35.

[551] *mkhas mchog grub brnyes ‘jam dpal nor bu dang/*
*khams pa sku gzhog [= zhabs] don rgyud nyi ma sogs skyes mchog du mas bdag la lung bstan ni/*
*gling gi dus nas seng chen zhabs drung du/*
*kun dga’ nyi ma zhes bya’i rlung rten dang/*
*’gro mgon ye pa chen po’i nye gnas ba/*
*bya me lha mchog zhe bya’i skye ba blang/*
bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s oral communication. gNas chen padma hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 1999. See bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s NTPB (1999: line 73).

> rituals drawn on King Ge sar's warrior status for the invocation of fierce energy that may be needed to subdue internal or external obstacles, and thus he became a 'warrior deity' frequently invoked in times of turmoil.[552]

But the link between bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and sMan pa Kun dga' nyi ma transcends that of the normative spiritual lineage that confers authority and legitimacy to a religious personality. With the awakening of his spiritual connection with Kun dga' nyi ma, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje claims he also received the knowledge to prepare sacred medicine pills. Although bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje never received any formal education in traditional Tibetan medicine and pharmacology, he claims that through his visionary experiences he was introduced to the preparation of sacred medicinal pills made in a ritual environment (*sman sgrub*). Different from the practice and notion of formal medical science, the activities associated with sacred medicinal substances and pills are nevertheless popular and highly valued throughout the entire Tibetan Buddhist world. The sacred medicine pills (*ril bu, ma ṇi ril bu*) are manufactured by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje using a variety of herbs, minerals, and flour and then blessed and sanctified within a specific ritual context. The ritual culminates with the invocation of the deity rTa mgrin nag po, a form of Hayagrīva, the horse-headed protector deity (*chos skyong*), wrathful emanation of Buddha Amitābha.

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje soon put this newly acquired knowledge in the service of his fellow Tibetans.[553] When he had the opportunity bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje would collect herbs and medicinal plants on the slopes of nearby mountains to prepare medicinal pills. At this time, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje continued secretly to bestow empowerments and give advice and simple teachings to a small circle of prudent devotees.

As a consequence of his visions of a past association with the legendary Tibetan hero Ge sar, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje also revealed a series of teachings associated with the cult of king Ge sar in the form of mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*) including the *Ge sar sgo nas sba lcag bsgrub pa'i gter mdzod*, the *Ge sar tshe sgrub*, a life-accomplishment ritual (*cho ga*) dedicated to Ge sar, and the *Ge sar gsol mchod*, a ritual offering to Ge sar. A further element that corroborates bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's special link to Ge sar's world is the special recollection of epic stories (*sgrung 'babs*) he has occasionally experienced during his life. Although Tibetans, especially eastern Tibetans, attach great importance to Ge sar's epic, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's reaction to

[552] Germano (1998: 59).
[553] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. gNas chen padma hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 1999.

his ability to remember episodes from Ge sar's adventures is one of non-involvement. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje believes that he has remembered several episodes of Ge sar's epic in past decades, but he has desisted from documenting them since he is convinced that the communication and circulation of these stories do not relate to his religious duties and do not pertain to his revelations. Although he was not meant to be a Ge sar story teller, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje believes that these recollections are nevertheless evidence of his special connection (*rten 'brel*) with Ge sar as a powerful deity and hence the authorization to receive and decipher special rituals and liturgies under visionary inspiration.[554]

The epic of Ge sar has a particularly significant influence on today's Tibetan religion and especially Buddhism as it connects mytho-historical and legendary elements reminiscent of the Tibetan empire era and the diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution the cult of Ge sar and his mythic power as a warrior king has been particularly re-emphasized within certain religious circles of the rNying ma school reaching a mythic status as the composition of many religious rituals and prayers in modern Tibet testifies.[555]

Just like bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje there are other Treasure revealers in Tibet today who claim spiritual lineage to him or his entourage and claim to reveal Treasures associated with the Ge sar cult, such as ritual paraphernalia and Tantric practices. Although religious scholars' attention to religious practices associated with Ge sar and different editions of the stories themselves increased in the nineteenth century, the emergence of Ge sar visions and revelations since the Cultural Revolution offers an interesting insight into the role of Ge sar as a national hero. The figure of Ge sar is that of a courageous and proud warrior and king who as an emanation of Padmasambhava is determined to defend his kingdom and fight the negative forces threatening the welfare of his land.[556] The emphasis on Ge sar in the contemporary setting is a way to create continuity in Tibetan tradition and to bridge the divide between the old Tibet and the new post-Cultural Revolution Tibet through the extemporaneous forms of Treasure revelation.

[554] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. gNas chen padma hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, July 1998.
[555] Germano (1998: 58-61).
[556] Samuel (1994b: 63).

## *Renaissance: Tradition and Change*

With the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the Chinese government instituted a major policy shift and adopted a new attitude towards Tibet and its people. They began to embrace a more open approach to handling internal affairs. Economic change and population control became the first priorities of the government, which was aiming at a set of economic reforms and social modernizations that were seen as necessary to develop the economy of the country and increase the well-being of its people.[557] However, in tandem with such a policy, Tibetans were also exposed to intense propaganda campaigns supporting strict political stability and national unity that undermined ethnic minorities' sense of cultural and religious identity.

Looking at the phenomenon as it was perceived in Tibet during the 1980s, much of the modernization announced by the government did not bring the Chinese government's expected positive results. After the disastrous "rural collectivization" policies of the 1960s and 1970s only poverty and discontent were to be found among most of the farmers and herdsmen in many areas of Tibet. However, from a cultural point of view, the new open policy introduced by Deng Xiaoping's political leadership tolerated a gradual, but nevertheless cautious, revival of once forbidden religious activities and cultural traditions. This meant that Tibetan religious leaders were allowed to rebuild or repair monasteries, monuments, and temples, and to reintroduce religious education training programs in line with the government's political ideology. Local authorities began to tolerate householder as well as some monastic religious practices.[558]

Many monastic and lay independent professionals took advantage of the generally tolerant atmosphere of such a cultural revival and an overall renaissance of religious practices ensued on both a formal and popular level. Local communities, villages, urban people, and devotees supported the restoration and in many cases the reconstruction of a significant number of religious sites and sacred places that were destinations for pilgrimage. Religious leaders collected donations to commission statues and have texts printed. Manuscripts previously saved from destruction found their place again on shelves in temples and assembly halls.

[557] In the early 1980s, the PRC state allowed criticism of previous mistakes and the harsh ideological measures applied by Mao Zedong's hard-line policy and they embraced a more open attitude in the light of modernization and progress. However, it is worth remembering that the actual situation was more complicated. Although the PRC promoted social development and economic reforms, it also instituted harsh measures in opposition to the young democratic movement, which emerged already in 1979, soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution. For a further analysis see Spence (1990: 659-666).

[558] For my discussion on post-Cultural Revolution religious policy and its impact on Tibet, see Chapter Two.

## *gNas chen padma shel ri: Reconnecting the Land with its People*

Although the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976 marked the end of the Cultural Revolution, the political turmoil lasted longer and class struggles, political sessions, and forced confessions continued in many areas of the country. Many rural brigades were abandoned in the countryside, and life took on a different pace in urban areas. However, the idolatry generated during the previous decade, the ideological atmosphere, and the political rhetoric retarded the recovery. Slowly the life of the Tibetans in sKye rgu mdo and Nang chen adapted itself to the dramatic changes.

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje left the production brigade in ’Be nang and went to live for a few years with some relatives in a small nomad community in mChe sgo phug near rTa nyub mdo village.[559] In the summer of 1979 he returned to Nang chen area following personal visions and the invitation of his old friend ’Phrin las kun khyab who was once head of the dGa’ ldan monastery in mGo rjo. With the intention of reopening the monastery to religious activities, ’Phrin las kun khyab renovated the monastery and asked bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje to help in the process. At that time bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje participated in the revival of other monastic communities in the area including Zur mang monastery, rDo rdo monastery, dPal med monastery, and Ge bcags thig chen byang chub gling nunnery.

Splitting his time between instructing monastics and pursuing his own personal meditation practice, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje traveled constantly staying at various monasteries and spending long periods of time in meditation retreat in multiple sites on Mount gNas chen padma shel. In the DDZG he recalls:

> Time was changing and this allowed for a recovery from decline. Moon beams fell upon the sentient beings, and I [again] stayed in a place of solitude for the welfare of the living beings. I practiced the profound teachings and trained in the intrinsic reality [of *rdzogs chen*]. At the timely actualization of [my] aspirations, the display-energy of awareness was greatly perfected.[560]

His meditation retreats were often interrupted by visitors asking for blessings and instruction. Monks and nuns, however, were not the only devotees and visitors who reached the Tantric

[559] The correct spelling of these two toponyms is not known to me. Here I am reporting the spelling as suggested to me by Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che.
[560] DDZG (1998: 9b).

master. Local villagers and nomads soon heard of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and started to pay regular visits wherever he was staying. They offered him donations and food and asked for religious service such as divinations (*phyag mo*), funerary rites of transference of consciousness (*’pho ba*), and prayer rituals (*zhabs brtan*) of various types. In particular, the members of the small community of mGo rjo who lived on the slopes of Mount gNas chen padma soon became his most assiduous visitors.

Mount gNas chen padma towers over a vast forest area of conifers, junipers, spruces, and pine trees and has an economy largely based on logging and barley cultivation. A few years after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978, the central government’s plans for socio-economic reform and new economic initiatives reached the western regions of China, including the areas of sKye rgu mdo and Nang chen. The specific economic plan for that area translated into logging, which, despite strict regulations, became the most important source of income for the local Tibetan farmers.

Among the oldest religious traditions of Tibet, the cult of mountain deities (*yul lha*), territorial lords (*gnas bdag*), and owners of the ground (*gzhi bdag*) are among the most ancient practices that are still performed.[561] Linked to the notion of family lineage, the cult of mountain deities was one of the first socio-religious activities that Tibetans revived in the 1980s.[562] At the root of this practice is the belief that local deities dominate and control the social life, livelihood, and health of the people who inhabit their lands. From agricultural practices and forestry to hunting and nomadic activities, Tibetans used to worship and propitiate local deities in order to achieve success in any of these activities.[563] Controlling and propitiating, the local divinities reflect and reiterate the ritual representation of various religious mytho-historical figures from King Srong btsan sgam po to Padmasambhava in their act of subduing and taming the apparently irate chthonic entities that were opposed to the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet.

Local oral tradition claims that Mount gNas chen padma was the residence of many a saintly person in the past, from Padmasambhava to rJe btsun Mi la ras pa and the seventeenth-century Treasure revealer ’Ja’ tshon snying po (1585-1656), who apparently discovered it as a

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[561] I translate *gzhi bdag* here as “owners of the ground” inspired by a translation given by Karmay (1996: 59) who rendered it as “owners of the base”. These are local territorial guardians and protective deities.
[562] There is abundant literature on the topic of mountain deity cults in Tibet and Tibetan cultural areas along the Himalayas. See among others the works of Karmay (1994; 1995; 1996), Blondeau (1995; 1996), and Ramble (2007).
[563] Karmay (1996: 59).

hidden valley (*sbas yul*).[564] Within the complex geomantic map of Mount gNas chen padma, the mountain is the abode of the dominant mountain deity (*yul lha*) of the *dge bsnyen* family dGe bsnyen rdo rje ‘bar ba and is itself the center of a mandala-like site surrounded by a retinue of thirteen assistant mountain deities.[565] The term *dge bsnyen* (Skt. *upāsaka*) means “lay person” or “lay Buddhist devotee” and the PKT refers to them as a class of pre-Buddhist deities that Padmasambhava supposedly tamed and converted into Buddhist protectors.[566] Predominantly belonging to an unwritten tradition, the mountain deity cult is traditionally practiced by the laity but not necessarily in opposition to the Buddhist monastic establishment.[567] Mountain cults support the belief that certain mountains are abodes of distinct gods and protective deities that must be propitiated in order for the local population to satisfy their worldly affairs and purposes.[568] In such a spirit, the inhabitants of mGo rjo and the neighboring areas perceived their propitiations to mountain deities as mitigating the effects of their exploitation of local natural resources such as logging and mining. This return to propitiating local deities in an exchange for worldly boons affirmed earlier notions of environmental relations and national and cultural identity.

In his capacity as Tantric professional (*sngags pa*) working for the welfare of a specific community (Shar mda’ in Nang chen), bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje was called on to take care of local affairs relating to the agro-pastoralist activities of the villagers and to reestablish the network of sacredness damaged by the mass violence and ideological prohibitions of the previous decade. In the ensuing twenty years until the early 2000s, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje repopulated the religious landscape of Mount gNas chen padma with mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*), Treasure places (*gter gnas*), and reliquary *stūpas* (*mchod rten*) centered on the cult of the local mountain deity dGe bsnyen rdo rje ’bar ba that was both the owner of the ground (*gzhi bdag*) and a Treasure guardian (*gter bdag*).[569] Thus, in the early 1990s bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje composed the *mDo stod gnas chen padma shel ri’i gnas bdag dge bsnyen rdo rje ’bar ba’i gsol*

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[564] bKra shis rgyal mtshan and Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che’s oral communication. gNas chen padma mountain hermitage, August 1998.

[565] These include gNyan btsan ri bkra gser mog, Klu yi dge gsnyen a mye thog phreng, g.Yu lha yi dge bsnyen thang lha rdo rje ’bar, Rag gad rag spom, g.Yo ram rag spom, ’O lung, Klu mon, mTsho sman, Klung btsan, sTag rtse, lHa brag dkar, mGon gnas stag rtse, lCi le stag rtse, and bKra shis g.yu rtse. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s oral communication. gNas chen padma hermitage, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu TAP), August 1999.

[566] Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956: 304).

[567] Karmay (1996: 59).

[568] Karmay (1996: 60).

[569] For definitions associated with the cult of mountain deities in the Tibetan tradition see Karmay (1996).

*mchod don kun 'grub pa'i dpal ster* (Glorious Gift of Universal Benefit: Offerings and Invocation to dge bsnyen rdo rje 'bar ba territorial lord of the Crystal Mountain gNas chen padma in Khams), a text of propitiations and invocations (*gsol mchod*) as part of the cult of the deity dGe bsnyen rdo rje 'bar ba. In this way bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje reinserted dGe bsnyen rdo rje 'bar ba and his retinue in the local religio-environmental practices thus reestablishing the ancestral link between nature and men and the villagers' control (at least ideological!) of the territory laying at the base of the Tibetan sense of national and cultural identity.

The reestablishment of the cult of dGe bsnyen rdo rje 'bar ba, however, was not only meant to consolidate the villagers' reconnection with the land and thus sanctify their environmental management. For bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje dGe bsnyen rdo rje 'bar ba was also a Treasure guardian (*gter bdag*), the guardian of cycles of Treasures that he was meant to reveal. Theologically, in order for a Treasure revealer to gain access to the Treasure cycles that he is meant to retrieve, he must first gain the trust of the guardian (*gter srung, gter bdag*) to whom their protection is entrusted.

From the early 1980s, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje lived in several sites on Mount gNas chen padma shel and founded a number of mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) including the Phrag dkar ri khrod (founded in 1985), the rDzing rgyal ri khrod (founded in 1988), the Lha ru dkar yol ri khrod (founded in 1990), and the Thab ma kha dir ri khrod (founded in 1991). Although these hermitages were meant only to be temporary dwellings for his meditation retreats, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje organized a few of them as small residences for groups of retreatants. Such is the case for the rDzing rgyal ri khrod, which is led today by rDo rje bkra shis, one of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oldest disciples, a non-celibate Tantric professional who is head of a modest community of monastics. In 1993 after months of persistent attempts, the community of mGo rjo invited bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje to move to their village and supervise the religious economy of the community. On the south face of Mount gNas chen padma, mGo rjo villagers prepared a hermitage completely furnished with a view over the Khri chu river for bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Here he founded the gNas chen padma shel ri mountain hermitage, which was the ideal place for him to practice in privacy while responding to the requests of the devotees and the place where he has lived until recently.

### *Revelations, Patronage, and Religious Instructions*

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje links his revelation activities directly to Padmasambhava. As he puts it:

> Thanks to [my] resolve in the Victorious One, who is particularly excellent, I aspired to earnestly engage in the innermost secret cycle of practices. I [thus] received the prophesied transmission and the Treasure-seal of the *ḍākinī*. This is the Great Perfection, the supreme vehicle, uttermost secret and highly glorified, which discloses the intention seal to the supreme Ati lineage. Like many lineage-holders fortunate because of their previous actions and aspirations, I properly obtained emancipation, which is complete renunciation.[570]

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's realization of his personal connection with Padmasambhava is germane to his own perception as revealer of Buddhist teachings. The disclosure of the intention seals (*dgongs rgya*) and the revelation of the *gter ma* teachings are therefore believed to directly result from aspirations and prophesies expressed in the past. From the early 1990s until now bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has revealed a total of twelve volumes of Treasure cycles and established his own community in the Nang chen area.

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's fame grew rapidly over the years and the leaders of local monastic institutions regularly sent their monastics to study under him for periods of time. This gained the support of other major religious figures who took the role of Treasure patrons (*chos bdag*), a role involving recognizing and authenticating a *gter ston*'s Treasure cycles, incorporating them into their own practices, and circulating them within their community. Next to patrons and benefactors (*sbyin bdag*), the *chos bdag* are essential figures for a Treasure revealer's social function and religious success because they are key to circulating in written form and propagating the Treasure revelation.[571] Over the years bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje has established and developed relationships with some of the most influential and popular teachers in contemporary Khams including the Fourth Chos 'gyur gling pa rin po che of rTsi ke, Grub dbang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan (also known as mKhan po A chos/mKhan po A khyug), the Second dPal me 'phrin brtse, Chos gling rgyal sras bstan pa'i nyi ma, Chos gling shāskya grags pa, mKhan po 'Jam dbyangs 'phrin rab, mKhan 'chi med dbang chen rdo rje, mTshan nyid 'jam dpal nor bu, the Second Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje, bSod nam chos 'phel rin po che, mKhan po Padma,

[570] DDZG (1998: 9b).
[571] bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. Ri phug kha mountain hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma, Yushu TAP, July 2000.

Dlon mchog rgyal mtshan, and the Second sTong dga' rin po che.[572] Until recently, most of them regularly sent a number of their monks and nuns to stay at bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's residence in order to receive religious instructions and to further their Tantric studies.

Despite the fact that the vast majority of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's disciples and mountain hermitage residents are monastics (both nuns and monks), bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) are not monastery-styled institutions. Only a few nuns and monks are permanent residents at the hermitages. Most of the monastics stay at his hermitages for a limited period of time to receive teachings, empowerments, and instructions before returning to their home monasteries. Generally, those who follow bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's teachings belong to all the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, though the majority of them are affiliated with the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud traditions.[573]

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje focuses predominantly on meditation and practice rather than scholastic learning. Most of the contemplation material he distributes among his followers is drawn from *gter* revelations, both his and his masters' and it is principally related to the Great Perfection and his own practices associated with Hayagrīva (*rta mgrin*). bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's actual educational program includes a vast range of ritualistic and propitiatory material (*sgrub thabs*; Skt. *sādhanā*) and classic Tantric literature of the rNying ma tradition, namely the cycle of practice literature concerning the Great Perfection system (*rdzogs chen*) including works by kLong chen rab 'byam pa such as the *kLong chen mdzod bdun* and 'Jigs med gling pa's *snying thig* tradition.[574] These are combined with instructional manuals (*khrid yig*), ritualistic and propitiatory texts from bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revealed Treasure teachings (*gter chos*).

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[572] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication. Ri phug kha hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, July 2000. It is especially with sTong dga' rin po che that a close and lasting relationship has consolidated over the years. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje visits Ru 'dren nunnery, a local branch of the original Ge bcags dgon pa founded by Ge bcags tshang dbyangs rgya mtsho, on an annual or biannual basis in order to give teachings and bestow empowerment to the nuns living in the center and the nomad populace of the area on request of the abbot of the nunnery sTong dga' rin po che.

[573] Nang chen and in general sKye rgu mdo areas have not been particularly fertile areas for the formation of rNying ma monastic compounds and communities. Most of the existing religious institutions represent the Sa skya and bKa' brgyud orders. The majority of monastics seeking bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's instructions come from rDza Mer chen and dPal me monasteries in Nang chen, which are among the most important bKa' brgyud centers in the area. Other monks who ask bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje for instructions are affiliated with a number of monasteries of the area including the rDo rdo monastery of the Sa skya tradition, the dGa' ldan monastery, and the Zur mang monastery.

[574] *kLong chen mdzod bdun* is a major work on r*dzogs chen* tradition composed by the fourteenth century kLong chen rab 'byams pa (1308-1363).

## *Concluding Remarks*

In the Tibetan literary tradition autobiographical and biographical writings of religious personalities play an important role in fostering faith and reverence for the master in the reader's mind and in the devotee's pursuit of enlightenment and self-liberation. In Tibetan studies this literary genre deserves special attention for it is in autobiography that we can find valuable information about the dynamics at work in a saint's self-conception and self-representation as a religious master. Reading autobiographies and biographies can also provide significant support for understanding the role that religious personalities play in the wider panorama of Buddhist institutions where monastic authority traditionally predominates over non-celibate forms of leadership. Additionally, autobiographies and biographies of charismatic religious figures such as bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's help inform us about the role of their hermitages and religious encampments and of the nature of communities formed around them.

The study of the DDZG and of the life of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje contributes to such an exploration in various ways. First of all, texts such as the DDZG say much about the circumstances and the elements believed to shape the life and career of a Buddhist authority and the modalities by which the narrative is shaped in a literary genre. In the DDZG, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje writes about important influences on his development as a Treasure revealer such as personal visions and experience as well as public forms of legitimacy, other teachers and religious figures.

Secondly the DDZG offers a platform from which to begin exploring a Tibetan Buddhist Treasure revealer's perception of his role in society and the necessary stages of his personal identification, namely, announcing visions, prophecies, recognition, and Treasure revelations. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's departure from his social matrix, the abandonment of his seemingly unfortunate past, and the beginning of a new life in a world of visions, appearances, and solitary places provides us with valuable material for insights into the modalities pertaining to a religious career. Additionally a study of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life has provided an introduction to the large spectrum of activities performed by Tibetan Buddhist masters and we have seen how they are to be understood in the context of religious activities and practice in present-day Tibet.

The idea behind the study presented in this chapter was to provide information about what narrative strategies can make religious autobiographical texts, such as the DDZG, effective

as a self-glorification of the author and a fostering of the Buddhist path. In the specific case of the DDZG we have seen what kind of narrative strategies are at work and the effects they may have on the reader's mind. Birth, miraculous signs, community tensions, forced departure followed by the beginning of a long journey, conscious preference for solitary and macabre sites as residences, inner exploration and early visions, first self-identification and the discovery of personal connection with the imperial past of Tibet and Padmasambhava, teachers and teachings, pilgrimage and travel, religious experiences and its signs, pilgrimage abroad to Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim, more teachers and more signs, beginning of revelations, dramatic episodes due to the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese Red Guards and Cultural Revolution, the end of the obscure years and the new beginning of revealing Treasures, all mark key points central to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's own career as Buddhist teacher and Treasure revealer.

# Chapter Five: Treasure Cycles, Heroic Ornaments, Yoga of Food, and the Mu tig Amulets



In the previous chapter we have analyzed the life and career of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and contextualized it within his historical framework. The study of his autobiography has allowed us to understand how this type of religious life story in Tibet can serve as a didactic tool for an audience largely formed by both monastic and lay devotees. However, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje is not only a Buddhist master. He is also a Treasure revealer, a Tantric practitioner, a yogi, a charismatic personality. This means that he is expected not only to transmit and teach esoteric practices to his pupils, but also to perform supernatural feats and miraculous deeds, such as healing the sick, distributing blessed herbal pellets, and offering protection using amulets and blessed items to a large community of followers.

The first section of the present chapter is devoted to the writings and activities of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. It will focus on the material that he produces through his religious activities. I will provide a brief introduction to and analysis of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s compilation of Treasure scriptures (*gter chos*), collectively known as the *Yang gsang rta mgrin rdo rje me char* (The Utterly Secret Hayagrīva’s Thundering Vajra). At present, despite the fact that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje announced that his revelations would fill twelve volumes, only nine volumes have been systematically organized and among these only a small number include a “table of contents” (*dkar chag*). Most of the more recent texts have not yet been organized into volumes. A plan had been announced by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s closest disciples, namely bKra shis rgyal mtshan and the late Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che, to edit the volumes, have them typeset via computer, and printed.

The second segment of this chapter will specifically focus on one of the revealed texts within the *Yang gsang rta mgrin rdo rje me char* collection, namely the *rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char gyi rtsol med gsang sngags myur lam*. This important text is an initiation manual for those who want to embrace the Tantric vows of a non-celibate practitioner. Beside the liturgical aspect of the text itself, I am particularly interested in exploring one element contained in the text related to the display of ornaments associated with the initiation ritual. Within the community of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje these ornaments (*rgyan*) are known as the *dpa’ chas bco*

*lnga* or the "fifteen heroic emblems." They have come to represent the regalia of the non-celibate Tantric practitioner. We will also address two of these emblems, the top-knot and the white robes, as specific elements of the non-celibate Tantric practitioner's identity.

The third section of this chapter is devoted to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's role as religious healer and producer of medicinal and yogic pellets within a ritual context (*sman sgrub*). As a Treasure revealer and Tantric professional, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje performs a social function beyond that of a religious leader and revealer of scriptures. One such role within his community is that of charismatic healer, a feature not uncommon within Treasure communities across Tibet. Also, among bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revelations are several ritual texts related to the production of *bcud len*, an alchemy-related extraction of essences utilized in a specific ritualized environment that combines the production and ritual consumption of herbal and mineral substances with highly advanced yogic techniques such as the manipulation of bodily energies.

The fourth and final section is a study of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's manufacture and distribution of his well-known *mu tig tsa tsa*, special clay amulets that are particularly sought by his devotees and followers for their protective value. In Tibet the cult of amulets has always been a central feature of popular religion. With the recent introduction of new technologies, the devotionalism represented by Buddhist images and amulets including photo portraits of Buddhist masters, sacred places, sanctified items, and charm boxes has been passionately revived. Some of the questions I will address in this section will be: What do the *mu tig tsa tsa* represent? Why are they so popular among bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's devotees?

## *Revelations: The Yang gsang rta mgrin rdo rje me char Collection*

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revelations are diverse. They include two types of Treasures. One part of the collection includes several retrieved-again Treasures (*yang gter*). bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje claims that it was his root teacher dPal me mkhyen brtse kung bzang 'gro 'dul who originally revealed these teachings. Only later did bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje rediscover them in the form of mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*) or pure visions (*dag snang*).[575] This material includes texts concerning Tantric liturgies (*sgrub thabs*; Skt. *sādhanā*) mainly centered on the deity *rta mgrin* (Hayagrīva), one of the representative deities of the eight transmitted precepts (*grub pa*

[575] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal communication. rDza mer chen monastery, Shar mda', Nang chen (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 2001.

*bka' brgyad*). These Hayagrīva teachings are contained in the third volume of the collection entitled *Hūm chen kā ra'i thugs tig las rta mgrin rdo rje me char*.[576] The remainder include bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal revelations. These focus on a variety of practices centered on principal bodhisattvas such as 'Jam dpal dbyangs (Mañjuśrī), sGrol ma (Tāra), 'Phags pa spyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara), and major deities such as Gu ru rin po che, bDud gshed (a manifestation of Gu ru rin po che), rDo rje phag mo (Vajravārāhī), and gShin rje (Yamarāj).

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's collection of Treasures includes Tantric liturgies, offering practices, and a series of instructional texts of more ritualistic nature. These consist of smoke offerings (*lha bsang*s), consecration rituals (*rab gnas*), rituals of offering and invocation (*gsol mchod*), feast offerings (*tshogs mchod*), longevity practices (*tshe sgrub*), and collections of *mantras* (*sngags 'bum*). Among the principal Tantric texts he revealed are the *Yang gsang rta mgrin rdo rje me char gyi rgyud*, one of the central texts of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revelations, the *Drag sngags yongs 'dus drang srong dmod pa'i rgyud*, and the *Ma rgyud*.

Generally speaking the basic concern of the revealed Treasure texts lies in the propagation of rituals. As already stated above, although the majority of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revealed texts are concerned with rituals, the collection also contains a substantial set of instructions, such as empowerment and instruction manuals traditionally associated with Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. Some of the more interesting texts are in the *Yang gsang rta mgrin rdo rje me char*, the core volume of the collection of revealed texts dedicated to Hayagrīva. Many represent the *rdzogs chen*, the central practice of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. The Atiyoga/*rdzogs chen* cycle includes texts such as the *Hūm chen kā ra'i thugs tig las rig pa gnad sprod byang chub sems gdams*, the *rTa mgrin gsang ba'i yang tig las snying thig padma'i zhal lung*, and the *Zab chos gnyen 'dul rta mchog nag po'i chos bka' zab mo*. Next to these practice texts are some of a more mundane nature that address various religious needs for the community of both monastic and lay disciples following bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's lineage. These ritual scriptures include texts necessary for the initiation of those entering the Tantric tradition, mainly non-celibate practitioners, such as the *rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char gyi rtsol med gsang sngags myur lam*, and a number of rituals with a more pragmatic application in daily rites. For example, the cycle includes texts consisting of a collection of *mantra*s (*sngags*

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[576] The title as reported here does not really appear on the title page of the volume, but rather on the title page of a table of contents (*dkar chag*), which opens the volume itself. This reads: *Hūm chen kā ra'i thugs tig las rta mgrin rdo rje me char dkar chag.* For a tentative list of the titles contained in his revelations see Appendix Three in this volume.

*’bum*) to improve such yogic skills such as swift walking (*rkang mgyogs*), longevity practices (*tshe sgrub*), extraction of elements (*bcud len*), ransom rites (*glud gdos*), life summoning (*bla ’gugs*), feast offerings (*tshogs mchod*), and practice session offering cakes (*thun gtor*).

In the collection of revealed texts produced by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, the instructional materials (*khrid yig*) deal primarily with practices that belong to the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) system. These are accommodated in separate cycles. Chief Tantric practices of generation stage (*bskyed rim*) and completion stage (*rdzogs rim*) with more advanced practices of both “cutting through” (*khregs chod*) and “direct transcendence” (*thod rgal*) are provided in a number of texts of the collection. These are predominantly included in the *Hūm chen kā ra’i thugs tig las rta mgrin rdo rje me char*. The *Hūm chen kā ra’i thugs tig las rig pa gnad sprod byang chub sems gdams*, for instance, is focused on the direct introduction to the intrinsic awareness (*rig pa’i ngo sprod*) that is the fundamental *rdzogs chen* explanation of the nature of the mind. A second text, the *rTa mgrin gsang ba’i yang tig las snying thig padma’i zhal lung*, expands on a discussion of appearances (*snang ba*), which are not only phenomena perceived by the sight but by all the senses. Texts such as these serve as the primary basis for the disciples’ meditation regime and provide the ground for further developments in the practice of *rdzogs chen*.

## *rTsol med: A Tantric Initiation Ritual for the White-robed Group*

As we have seen in Chapter Three, in present-day Tibet the class of non-celibate Tantric specialists (*sngags pa*) and Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) still by and large operates according to the same values and patterns it did in pre-modern Tibet. This is particularly interesting if considered in the context of the contemporary social and political transformation of Tibet in the PRC, where the assertion of Tibetan identity and the maintenance of traditional religious practices are undergoing continuous challenges.[577] Additionally, while Buddhist monastics practice mainstream Tantric material and respect strict sets of prescribed rules and vows belonging to the ethical and moral order, non-celibate religious communities, independent religious personalities, and Tantric practitioners opt for alternative ways of practice including

[577] It is worth noting here that much concern for the preservation of traditional culture and other forms of ethnic identity, such as language, religion, and local customs in Tibet, is continually emphasized also by the Tibetan authorities representing the Tibetan government in exile, based in Dharamsala (HP) in India and headed by the Dalai Lama.

often unconventional modes of self-assessment and religious gathering. Non-celibate Tantric movements are a vital dimension of Tibetan Buddhist culture especially in the contemporary setting. The role of nonmonastic Buddhist intellectuals and the lay religious contemplative rituals they disseminate are as much part of the Tibetan cultural identity as institutional monasticism. The study of non-monastic religious communities may give us a glimpse into the nature, role, aspirations, and lifestyles that support their existence.

An important text that provides bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje with the necessary authority to establish his role as leader of his community is the *rTsol med* or the *rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char gyi rtsol med gsang sngags myur lam* (The Effortless Quick Path of the Secret Mantra according to rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char henceforth TsM). This is an instructional Tantric manual (*khrid yig*) for an empowerment ritual that belongs to the collection of the *rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char* Tantra for the meditative realization of Hayagrīva. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje revealed and composed the TsM in the form of a mind Treasure (*dgongs gter*) in 1989. In the typical fashion of a mind Treasure, in the concluding lines of the colophon in the TsM we read:

> Now I shall hide these instructions in you, oh Dharmarāja, in the space of the mind. Because they will be beneficial as a remedy in the future, in times of degeneration and suffering, they protect both the teachings and the living beings. It’s a treasury of good Dharma for the one named rDo rje of the bird year.
> *i thi*
> *Sa ma ya*
>
> Sealed Sealed Sealed.[578]

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje considers the TsM being in line with other Tantric manuals and instructional materials practiced by saints and masters of the past in the form of both oral instructions and Treasure revelations. In particular, the TsM addresses the class of non-celibate Tantric adepts known in Tibetan as *gos dkar lcang lo can* because of the white dress (*gos dkar*)

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[578] *da lta chos rgyal khyod la gdams/*
*ma ongs snyigs ma sdug bsngal dus/*
*bstan ’gro skyobs pa’i gnyen po tu [= du]/*
*phan phyir thugs klong du sbos/*
*’dab chung lo rdoe [= rdo rje] ’i ming yi chos skal nyid du mdzod/*
*i thi/ sa ma ya rgya rgya rgya/*
TsM, f. 8b-9a.

and long hair (*lcang lo*) that characterize their ritual attire. Explaining the meaning of the TsM, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje comments:

> The superior doctrine of the most profound Vajrayāna of the early translations is contained in this teaching of highest power, the refined seminal essence of the effortless Ati rDzogs pa chen po. This is the ultimately profound quick path to seek realization [in the form of] instructions on becoming enlightened in the primordial space of Samanthabhadra. Those who exert in this superior and unique doctrine [maintain] the three precepts perfect.
>
> Specifically, this is the indispensable and amazing unique doctrine for the group of those who wear white robes and have long hair and who hold the samaya of the Vajrayāna of the Secret Mantra. The system of the excellent beings who achieve the realization through the practice of the Eight Heruka Sādhanās (*sgrub pa bka’ brgyad*), the profound path of the Vajrayāna of the Early Translations, is unmistakably associated with the practice of the presentation of the ornaments that seal the emblems of such a distinctive doctrine. This originates from the extraordinary spiritual songs of the scholars of the past and will be suitable for future followers. Therefore, we should understand the inner meanings as well as the outer signs, so that we don’t pick up those mental artificialities that nowadays so randomly gather around us.[579]

Therefore, despite being addressed to all those who commit to the three precepts of *prātimokṣa*, *bodhisattva*, and *vajrayāna*, the ideal initiands referred to in the TsM are those who represent the “group of [those who wear] white robes and top-knot” (*gos dkar lcang lo’i sde*). This is a literary appellation or an epithet for the community of non-celibate Tantric professionals more popularly referred to as *sngags pa* in Tibetan. Distinguished the monks (*so thar rab byung*) who live in monasteries, the Tantric adepts of the *gos dkar lcang lo* group are often called village lamas (*grong sngags*) and they typically live as householders (*khyim pa*) in villages (*grong tsho*) and in families (*khyim tshang*).[580] As we shall see below, the language of the initiation ritual is as rich as it is complex. At the heart of the TsM is the emphasis on “effortlessness” or non-action (*rtsol med*) a common notion present in *rdzogs chen* discourse.[581] The term “effortlessness” (*rtsol med*) recurs often in *rdzogs chen* scriptures and refers to the unique aspect of this system, the potential for devoted practitioners to reach enlightenment by practicing one fundamental teaching, the

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[579] *yang zab snga ’gyur rdo rje theg pa’i khyad chos ni/ rtsol med a ti rdzogs pa chen po’i yang zhun snying gi thig le dbang rab bstan ’dir grub pa brnyes pa’i myur lam zab mo mthar thug kun bzang gdod ma’i dbyings su ’tshang rgya ba’i gdams ngag gzhan la med pa’i khyad chos ’di la brtson pa’i gang zag sdom pa gsum la sel med pa/ khyad par gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa’i dam ldan gos dkar lcang lo’i sde la med du mi rung ba’i khyad chos ngo tshar can ’di/ snga ’gyur rdo rje theg pa’i zab lam sgrub pa bka’ brgyad nyams len sgrub pa thob pa’i dam pa rnams kyi lugs srol ma ’ongs rjes ’jug rnams la ’os pa’i khyad chos brda dang phyag rgya’i rgyan gyi rnam bzhag nyams len dang ’brel ba ma nor ba rig ’dzin gong ma rnams kyi gsung mgur khyad par can las ’byung ba las/ deng rabs kyi blo bcos rang snang gang shar su btus pa ma yin pas ’di don khog tu chud cing phyi rtags nang du mtshungs dgos pa yin no//*
bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s personal written communication. rDza mer chen monastery, August 2001.
[580] Nyi zla he ru ka (2003).
[581] Karmay (1988: 18).

attainment of intrinsic awareness (*rig pa*).[582] Among the three highest yogas of the nine vehicles to enlightenment elaborated by rNying ma tradition, Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga/*rdzogs chen*, the *rdzogs chen* system is believed to be the pinnacle. According to this view, the practice of *rdzogs chen* alone is a guarantee of personal liberation (*rang grol*). Regarding the TsM, Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che believes that:

> The *rtsol med* is an important text because first of all it is addressed to the yogis of the effortless mantras of the utterly secret Ati. These will achieve bodily perfection having the ten powers, the three awarenesses, and having disciplined the space of their mind stream. They will attain mastery in the yoga of channels and energies, and the phenomenal world will rise as a divine body.[583]

What is particularly interesting in the context of this study, however, is not only the philosophical content of the scripture that certainly deserves further investigation, but the reference to a certain set of items that are used by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and his community as part of their Tantric regalia. In the typical fashion of Tantric initiation texts, the TsM expounds on a peculiar set of implements and decorations (*rgyan*) that glorify the figure of the Tantric adept. The newly initiated adept, as we shall see in further detail, is supposed to carry the implements and wear the ornaments. The instructions (*gdams ngag*) about these ornaments, however, come in the form of a list of specific items that are material markers of the yogi's spiritual advancement and mastering of contemplative practices. This esoteric apparatus symbolizes the practitioner's expertise in the various aspects of the "quick path" (*myur lam*) to liberation of Vajrayāna. I argue that these ornaments and bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and his followers' appearance belong to the sphere of self-representation and contribute to a sense of identity in the same way a shaved head, maroon-saffron robes, and other Vinaya-prescribed features are valued in the context of formal monasticism. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's disciples support the fashion of permanently wearing white robes (or partially white robes) and long matted hair gathered in a top-knot and carrying and/or displaying other implements as publicly and liturgically recognized marks of their non-celibate Tantric status.

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[582] Dalai Lama (2000: 48). For my discussion on bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's *rDzogs chen*, see Chapter Four.

[583] Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che's oral communication. gNas chen padma mountain hermitage. Yushu TAP, Qinghai, July 1998.

The TsM, therefore, provides the basis in this revelation tradition for a series of ritual attributes and the clothing of the Tantric practitioner.[584] These are long hair, white robe, conch-shell earrings, bone ornaments, gold cross *vajra*, mirror, *rākṣa* prayer beads, meditation ribbon, a nine-pronged *vajra*, a ritual dagger, the raven crest, a black silken cloak, a sling, a bow and arrows, and a pair of felt boots. Each of these emblems (*rgyan*) is in fact symbolically (*brda*) associated with a specific field of spiritual realization attained by the Tantric adept. The aim of the text is to initiate the practitioner to his/her new status of Tantric adept. Additionally, through the acceptance of the Tantric ornaments and implements, the practitioner of the specific teachings provided by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revelations embraces a new lifestyle exemplified by his Tantric practices and represented in his codified attire. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje seems to be particularly keen on the transmission of this text to his closest disciples according to their commitment and advancement in the practice. Although not necessarily a rule, the initiation is usually offered to those students who have at least completed the preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*), as described, for instance, in the *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*. Within bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's community, such a practice is usually combined with the *Zab lam rdzogs pa chen po'i sngon 'gro'i ngag 'don padma dga' tshal*, a shorter manual revealed by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje.[585] It is my sense that the idea behind this might be bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's intention to promote the tradition of the non-celibate Tantric yogi and disseminate his own distinctive revealed lineage.

The initiation ritual and the display of the emblems (*rgyan*) in the TsM are strictly associated with the practice of the Tantras of the Early Translations (*snga 'gyur*). In the TsM it is written:

> The Effortlessness of the uttermost secret Hayagrīva, the very secret Vajra thunder, spreads the view of all the yogis of the Secret Mantra instructed according to their minds. These practitioners are in

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[584] The colophon of the TsM provides no information about the date or the circumstances of revelation. 1989 is the date of revelation as reported by bKra shis rgyal mtshan, and later confirmed by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Ri phug kha hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, July 2000.

[585] The *rDzogs pa chen po klong chen snying tig gi sngon 'gro'i khrid yig kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung* better known by its abbreviated title, *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung* (The Words of the Perfect Teacher) is a well-known introductory manual to the practice of the kLong chen snying thig composed by rDza dpal sprul O rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po (1808-1887). This text has gained wide popularity among practitioners following the rNying ma tradition. In the curriculum provided by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje this text constitutes the main basis for the preliminary practices but it is nevertheless accompanied by a few specific texts and teachings from the *gter ston*'s own revealed tradition. The *sKu gsum bla ma'i sgrub skor las zab lam rdzogs pa chen po'i sngon 'gro'i ngag 'don padma dga' tshal* is associated with the bDud gzhed manifestation of Gu ru rin po che. It is a *dgongs gter* bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje revealed recently in 2003, while residing at his new seat at Mer chen dge dgon bkra shis chos gling.

> harmony with the experience of the lineage of the three adoptions (*khyer so gsum*). They are the followers of the Early Translations and, therefore, they gladly bear on their bodies the virtues of the ten powers as signs of perfection.[586]

Those who receive the Tantric initiation gather in front of their *vajra*-master (*rdo rje slob dpon*; Skt. *vajrācārya*). According to the TsM they must be practitioners who commit to the three precepts of external *prātimokṣa*, internal bodhisattva, and secret Vajrayāna. Technically, the initiation is open to both monastics and non-celibate practitioners, but only non-celibate practitioners wear the full white-robed attire of the Tantric adept. Monks, instead, maintain the attire of the fully-ordained monastic. Nuns who receive the initiation and adhere to its precepts, while not wearing the white robes, symbols of non-celibacy, let their hair grow and keep it in long dreadlocks gathered in a topknot. However, the initiation seems to be directed more to the non-celibate class of Tantric adepts since through this ritual the initiands become members of the *gos dkar lcang lo can* community. Also, the TsM specifies that the initiands to the ritual should have attained the four confidences (*gdeng bzhi*),[587] which are part of the Four Consolidations (*mtha' rten bzhi*) of Direct Transcendence (*thod rgal*). These are the confidence of having no fear of hell, having no expectations of karmic results as *saṃsāra* is non-existent, having no hope of attainments, and having no joy.[588] Additionally, their chosen *guru* must be one who recognizes the four characteristics (birth, old age, sickness, and death).[589]

The initiands offer the *maṇḍala* of the three doors (body, speech, and mind) to their *vajra*-master and make a formal request to receive the initiation. They repeat their request three times and once they have received the Tantric vows (*sdom*) they visualize the *vajra*-master in the form of rTa mgrin (Hayagrīva). From his heart they should see a *Ya* syllable transforming into a black scorpion emanating fire in all directions. The *vajra*-master thus touches their bodies with the intent of burning away all the sins that produce obscuration and recites the mantra *ōm badzra*

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[586] TsM, f. 1a. The term *che rtags*, the signs of perfection, or "marks of greatness," refers to the inner or external signs, or symbols, that testify for the Tantric practitioner's achievements in the practice of the Secret Mantra (*gsang sngags*) and *rdzogs chen* systems. gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. Ri phug kha hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, July 2000. The *khyer so gsum*, here rendered with "three adoptions" refers to the three different sets of vows; these are the *so thar gyi sdom pa*, *byang sems kyi sdom pa*, and *gsang sngags kyi sdom pa*, that is the "three precepts" (*pratimokṣa* vows, *bodhisattva* training, and *vajrayāna samaya*) mentioned above.

[587] TsM, f. 2b.

[588] Thondup (1989: 86-87), Kapstein and Gyurme Dorje (1991, II: 124).

[589] Kapstein and Gyurme dorje (1991, II: 135), provide a different list: old age, sickness, death, and a wandering ascetic.

*yaksha kre dhā sarba sā sam dzwa la rōm* (sic).[590] He then requests the initiands to sit in the "Seal of Vairocana" position and asks them to recite the mantra *ōm shu nya ta dznyā na badzra swa bha wā arma konya hōm* (sic).[591] Then the *vajra*-master instructs the initiands to visualize Vajrasattva in the enjoyment body of *sambhogakāya* with a white body, one face, and two hands, holding a *vajra* in one hand and a bell in the other. He sits in the full lotus position of the Bodhisattva (*sems pa'i skyil grung gyi bzhugs pa*) like a moon on a lotus flower seat. He has a white *Ōm* syllable on the crown of the head, a red *Ā* syllable at the throat, and a blue *Hūm* syllable at the heart representing the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha. The *vajra*-master anoints these very same spots on the bodies of the initiands with drops of *amrita* nectar (*bdud rtsi thig le*). He visualizes that after having received the three adamantine syllables (*rdo rje'i yig 'bru*) corresponding to the body, speech, and mind of all the Tathāgatas of the ten directions, the syllables will merge.[592] Then using the gesture (*mūdra*) of the single pronged *vajra* the *vajra*-master touches the initiands at the three spots (head, throat, and chest).[593]

Next, the *vajra*-master gives the initiands an introduction to the procedure explaining the precepts (*samaya*) associated with the practice and asks the disciples to maintain them with purity. He warns them that failure to maintain pure vows will cause the Vajrarākṣa (Vajrasattva) to burn their hearts and interrupt their path to enlightenment. If instead they maintain their vows purely, they will achieve accomplishments. He therefore invites them to repeat after him the mantra *sa ma ya i dam na ra kan* (sic),[594] which calls the demon Yakṣa me dbal as witness. This section of the ritual ends with a recitation of the mantra *sa ma ya ha na ha na* meant to verbally bind the disciples to their vows, while the *vajra*-master touches the disciples on their heads with a *vajra*, thus sealing their commitments to the vows of practice.[595]

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590 TsM, f. 3a.
591 TsM, f. 3b. The Seal of Vairocana (*rnam snang gi phyag rgya*) refers to the yogic position more known under the common name of "seven point posture of Vairocana" (*rnam snang gi chos bdun*): 1. *rkang pa skyil mo krung* (sitting crossed legs or full lotus position); 2. *lag pa mnyam bzhag* (hands composed in the same way. Usually both of the backs of the hands lie on the thighs, palms upwards and with the thumbs slightly touching the base of the ring finger. The arms are perfectly stretched); 3. *sgal tshigs drang bor bsrang ba* (the back spine straight); 4. *mgring pa cung zad gug pa* (the neck slightly bent downward); 5. *dpung ba rgod gshog ltar brkyangs pa* (the shoulders extended upwards like the wings of a vulture); 6. *mig sna rtser phabs pa* (eyes falling on the tip of the nose); 7. *lce ya rkan la sbyar ba rnams* (the tongue is stuck to the palate). bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's oral communication (2000).
592 TsM, f. 3b.
593 *gnas gsum*, the "three places" or "three spots": *sku* (body), corresponding to the head; *gsung* (speech), corresponding to the throat; and *thugs* (mind), corresponding to the heart. The *rdo rje rtse gcig pa* one pronged *vajra*, is a *mudra* gesture in which the two middle fingers point towards the top while the other fingers are crossed to each other.
594 TsM, f. 4b.
595 TsM, f. 4b.

After that, the *vajra*-master offers the implements (*rgyan rnams*) and describes the attire of the disciples as they become new members of the group of non-celibate Tantric practitioners who wear the white robes and the topknot (*gos dkar lcang lo can*). The main body of the text lists a series of fifteen implements (*rgyan*) that are commonly referred to as "heroic emblems" (*dpa' chas*) in the daily parlance of members of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's community. These are the attire (white robes and topknot), regalia of (human bone articles), and ritual paraphernalia allegedly prescribed by Padmasambhava as symbols (*brda*) of certain specific stages of the yogi's achievements in the Tantric practice. In the TsM the ornaments are listed in the following passage:

> Great Fortune! Oh, [you] great beings Awareness-Holders who have confidence in the four systems of deliverance, [you] are the great supreme ones who have the great majesty of the nine expression modes, and the style of contemplative experience to realize ascetic achievements. [Listen] yogi who has mastered the subtle energies and mind (*rlung sems*) [and belongs to] the genuine and natural group [of those who wear] the white robes and matted hair.
> The long hair (*dbu skra ral pa*) matted on the top of the head is a symbol of the mastery of the Secret Mantras, being Awareness-Holders with highest realization. The white cotton cloth (*ras dkar*) covering the glorious body is the symbol of the ignition of the blissful heat (*bde drod*) through channels, winds, and seminal nuclei. The ornamental earrings (*snyan cha*) [made] of precious conch-shell (*dung*) are the symbol of turning the wheel of the *Dharma* of method and wisdom. You wear a net of six ornaments [made] of bone (*rus pa'i rgyan drug drwa ba*) as symbol of the leader of a crowd of a hundred thousand *ḍākinīs*.[596] Around the neck is a golden cross-*vajra* (*gser gi rdo rje rgya gram*) which is a symbol of the accomplishment of the four kinds of religious service.[597] The clear mirror (*gsal ba'i me long*) on the chest is a symbol of clear knowledge of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. You hold a rosary [made] of black *rākṣa* beads (*raksha nag po'i rdo shal*) as symbol of the burning of the powerful tongue of fire[598] of the power of the wrathful *mantra*. The meditation ribbon (*sgom 'ching*) in the five colors of the rainbow is the symbol of the cross-legged sitting posture [representing] firm meditation in the sky. A nine-pronged *vajra* (*rdo rje rtse dgu*) [to hold up] in space is the symbol of the appearance of the realization of the nine vehicles of contemplative experience. An iron or powerful *kīla* (*phur ba*) rolling in [one's] hand is the symbol of the triumph over the *dam sri*-demons that are enemies of the Teachings. The raven crest ([*bya rog*] *prog zhu*)[599] worn as a hat is the symbol of the conquest of the phenomenal world. Your will wear a large cloak of black silk (*mthig nag dar gyi ber chen*) that is the symbol of the submission of the major deities to [one's own] service. A multi-colored stone-throwing sling (*'ur thig khra bo*) is the symbol of crushing the evil and negative creatures into dust. In the right and the left [hands] are bow and arrow (*mda' gzhu*) [representing] method and wisdom. These are the symbol of the support from the allied troops of defenders [against]

[596] These are the six ornaments used by the Tantric yogi, which are made out of human bone (*rus pa'i rgyan drug*): a head gear, earrings, necklace, armlets, bracelets, and anklets (*Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* p. 2713).
[597] The Four Kinds of Religious Service (*zhi rgyas dbang drag gi 'phrin las*): milder worship, abundant service, religious service to obtain power, and terrifying methods in coercing a deity by charms (*Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, p. 2383).
[598] Here the "tongue of fire" stands for "ability or fluency in recitations".
[599] *krog zhu* in the text. This is a spelling error for *prog zhu*, helmet, hat or crest, nence "the raven crest."

> the enemies of virtues. [A pair of] fish-headed felt boots (*srin lham nya mgo*) at the feet are the symbol of the offerings from both worldly gods and demons on the crown of one's head.[600]

In the TsM then the initiands are instructed to visualize themselves as fortunate beings who have taken the pledge of the implements and are now emissaries/messengers connected to each other as *vajra* brothers and sisters. Empowered as divine beings with *vajra*-armor (*rdo rje'i go cha*) they shall dwell in the wheel (*'khor lo*) of the channels, winds, and seminal nuclei; as blessings of the root-teacher, they are like banks of clouds resting in the wheel of the immutable *vajra* body; as six/sixty branches they descend melodiously in the wheel of speech as an unobstructed divine voice. They enter the sphere of the ground of unobscured and clear primordial purity in the wheel of the mind as unified clarity and emptiness (*gsal stong zung 'jug*).[601] At this point the *vajra*-master invites the initiands to express their aspiration with the following supplication:

> Having received the empowerment to the fearless and pure Dharmakāya,
> may we realize the two excellent *rūpakāya* (Sambhogakāya and Nirmāṇakāya)![602]

Afterward, the initiands recites the aspiration prayer to receive the royal consecration (*rgyal srid dbang thob*). Displaying the eight auspicious symbols (*rtags brgyad*), which are the umbrella (*gdung*), the royal banner (*rgyal mtshan*), golden fish (*gser nya*), the lotus flower (*pad ma*), the white conch-shell (*dung dkar*), the vase (*bum pa*), the endless knot (*dpal be'u*), and the golden wheel (*gser 'khor lo*), the *vajra*-master performs the consecration declaring the symbols supreme representatives of the Buddhist Doctrine and guardians of all teachings and human beings. The *vajra*-master eventually concludes the ritual pronouncing a few words of advice and encouraging the initiands to practice with diligence and perseverance with the aspiration to attain enlightenment.

The TsM plays a central role in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal theological reflections and sense of religious identity. It also finds a special place in general issues concerning the institution of lineages of visionary movements and especially the class of non-celibate Tantric professionals in Tibetan religions. The TsM sanctifies the initiation of individuals to the practice of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's lineage, provides legitimacy to the

[600] TsM, f. 5b-6b. Brackets are mine.
[601] TsM, f. 7a.
[602] TsM, f. 7a.

transmission strategy of the ritual, and at the same time enriches the sense of identity for the religious members of the community.

## *Top-knot, White Robes, and the Raven Crest: The Fifteen Heroic Ornaments*

As the heroic ornaments are associated with and represent specific elements of the Tantric adept's practice, the display of the *dpa' chas lco lnga* is central to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's sense of religious identity. Not only does bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje wear most of the articles, but also his closest disciples such as gTer chen bKra shis rgyal mtshan, dPal chen lha mo, and bKra shis mtsho mo wear these articles.

Although the total number of articles described in the TsM is fifteen, adherents do not always wear them simultaneously. A few elements of the attire as prescribed in the TsM are always and openly carried on the body, as in the case of the top-knot (*lcang lo*), the *rākṣa* bead rosary (*do shal*), a white cotton shawl (*ras dkar*), the ritual *kīla* dagger (*phur pa*), a mirror (*me long*), and a crossed-*vajra* pendant (*rdo rje rgya gram*). However, most practitioners wear the other items primarily during rituals and ceremonies and during solemn religious events, as in the case of the conch-shell earrings (*dun gi snyan cha*), the six bone articles (*rus pa'i rgyan drug*), the meditation ribbon (*sgom mching*), and the raven crest (*bya rog prog zhu*). The Tantric adept can thus be identified by these emblems and his peculiar attire. The observance of the "fifteen heroic emblems" is thus compulsory for the adept, who will carry them for the rest of his life. In the typical fashion of the Treasure tradition, the teaching is believed to be beneficial to future generations in periods of particular hardship. The closing statement in the TsM confirms the hiding of the teachings in the Treasure revealer's mind. Once these are revealed, they will function as a remedy, or an antidote (*gnyen po*) to the suffering of future generations.[603]

Those who practice the way of asceticism and hardships (*dka' spyod*) should always be aware and conscious of the symbolic meaning and associations related to these articles and carry them as symbols of their status.[604] Since not all of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's followers, either monastic or non-celibate practitioners, progress in their Tantric studies, only the more advanced

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[603] TsM, f. 9a.

[604] TsM, f. 8b. The concept of asceticism is expressed many times in the text by the word *dka' byed* and *dka' thub spyod pa* a term more likely to be translated into English as "hardships" or "austerities". In the text the word also appears in an erroneous spelling, *bka' spyad* [= *dka' spyad*].

are introduced to this system of contemplation. Each of these ornaments retains a symbolic meaning related to a specific skill in the Tantric practice. Together they constitute a tradition (*lugs gsol*) of asceticism that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje maintained and passed down to the next generation of practitioners.[605] Although asceticism in the Tibetan world has not been codified or systematically ascribed to specific sets of rules and regulations, nevertheless it has a significant role in the religious milieu where ascetics and hermits enjoy respect from the local population. It is interesting to note that while renunciation is fundamentally understood as a path of abandonment, and this is a state regulated by rejections and prohibitions, the same path prescribes a set of articles that the renunciant is supposed to carry during his life of practice and austerity.[606]

Although, monastic regulations in the form of the Vinaya code stipulate proper conduct, appropriate attire, and various items for the monks, Tibetan ascetics and Tantric adepts exhibit ornaments, ritual paraphernalia, and unconventional attire. This is true particularly of the ascetics and non-celibate Tantric practitioners belonging to the rNying ma, bKa’ brgyud, and Sa skya schools alike. It is my sense that in the specific environment of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s community, the need to exhibit such external appearance is a way to contrast themselves against the strictures of monasticism. The lifestyle of the non-celibate householder Tantric professional (*sngags pa kyim pa*) is usually in marked contrast with that of the fully ordained monk in a series of contrasting patterns such as celibacy/non-celibacy, shaved head/long matted hair, institutionalized authority/personal charisma. The important point is that the adoption of a certain way of life and the proposal of a well-marked and personalized self-representation reflects the tendency to acquire and confirm a well-established sense of identity.

In general, Treasure revealers and Tantric professionals alike seek to identify themselves in ways that are clearly recognizable by their community. Monks are identified as such by the normative institution of monasticism they come to represent and from which they develop their sense of identity and community. On the contrary, most non-celibate Tantric professionals are

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[605] Generally speaking similar traditions are typical and characteristic of many Tantric adepts who belong, although not exclusively, to the non-monastic milieu of the rNying ma order of Tibetan Buddhism.

[606] In this regard I specifically have in mind the studies of Indian asceticism and renunciation, for instance, by Heesterman (1985), and Olivelle (1992). In my analysis of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life-style I have noticed similarities that inevitably remind me of Indian ascetics and renouncers. Although rubrics such as asceticism and renunciation in Tibetan religions are topics worthy of extensive research and study, they will not receive their deserved attention here. However, it is my intention to contribute some preliminary remarks on Tibetan asceticism that are topics for further investigation.

religious personalities who live the life of the householder and thus have to rely first and foremost on the charismatic guidance and protection that they provide for people and the miraculous powers they are believed to exert on natural phenomena for their recognition by the community as religious authorities. In this regard, Gyatso suggests that "to be perceived and recognized by others is an assurance that one exists; by being another to someone else, one is a self to oneself, whatever the precise nature of that self."[607]

As we have explored in the study of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's autobiography, the recognition of a Treasure revealer is a rather complex matter. While for a fully ordained monk his authority lies in his belonging to formal institutional monasticism, for a Treasure revealer this authority is instead acquired in other ways. In accordance with the tradition, some teachers have recognized bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje as one of Padmasambhava's closest disciples, Shud bu dpal gyi seng ge. Pilgrims and villagers recognize his wisdom and control over the elements and nature by considering his advice, divinations, and spiritual guidance. Monastics and disciples recognize his knowledge and spiritual achievements and see him as teacher and preceptor.

Many of these symbolic and ritual items are associated with a yogi's state of asceticism. The emblems of asceticism are to be understood as emblems of the adept's skills in the advancement of his religious practice. They represent individual prowess and ritual specialty. The *dpa' chas bco lnga* described in the TsM are therefore considered emblems that represent achievements gained along the quick path (*myur lam*) to enlightenment (*'tshang rgya ba*). The "presentation of ornaments" (*rgyan gyi rnam bzhag*) is an important practice for devoted adepts who are recognized as advanced practitioners of *rdzogs chen*.

Within the discourse of the *dpa' chas bco lnga* described in the TsM and understood by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and bKra shis rgyal mtshan only one of the fifteen ornaments belongs, strictly speaking, to the sphere of the physical body itself: the hair. Long matted locks are in fact the only part of the body to be symbolically associated with a specific spiritual and esoteric achievement, namely, mastery of the Secret Mantras. All the other parts of the Tantric adept's attire are ritual implements or religious emblems.

Some scholars have discussed the function of hair and its symbolism in a religious context.[608] The hair is apparently a powerful "psychological statement" often advanced by

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[607] Gyatso (1998: 220).
[608] See for instance Bogin (2008), Lang (1995), and Obeyesekere (1981).

marginal personalities of the religious group.[609] Powerful symbolic statements, such as bodily marks and ornaments, convey the presence of small marginalized groups within a society, in this case non-celibate religious personalities, who seek to negotiate their position, recognition, and identity within a given society significantly dominated by the institution of monasticism. In his study of the sociocultural meaning of matted hair in Sri Lanka, Obeyesekere has pointed out how the personal psychological dimension of the symbol (in this case hair) and its publicly sanctioned role interact. Considering the shaved hair of the Buddhist monks and the long matted hair of Hindu-Buddhist non-celibate religious ecstatics, for instance, Obeyesekere observes that in its anthropological dimension the symbolism of the hair addresses the core of the celibacy/non-celibacy dichotomy: sex. Whereas shaved heads represent the monk's renunciation of sex in all its forms, therefore a symbolic "castration" and chastity, the non-celibate renouncer denies such an act letting his/her hair grow long and matted and producing the unconscious opposite result, "eroticism."[610] The shaved head of the monastic, therefore, is mostly considered as the symbol of a separation from sexual desire and engagement with the lifestyle of the renunciant. The long loose hair of the Tantric adept, instead, symbolizes the acceptance of sexuality and the channeling of sexual power in the advancement of spiritual practice.[611]

The long hair matted in locks or braided (*skra'i lan bu*) gathered on one's head (*dbu skra thod du bcing ba*) is probably the most widely known and publicly recognized symbol representing *sngags pas* in Tibet.[612] In fact, according to the TsM, the top-knot symbolizes the mastery of the secret *mantra*, which is the main function and specialty of Tantric professionals. Here too, an immediate difference is clear. A fully ordained Buddhist monk (Skt. *bhikṣu*; *dge slong*) is committed to shaving his head regularly as a sign of his renunciation (*rab byung*) of a world ruled by hedonistic senses. In contrast, the non-celibate Tantric professional does not renounce the senses, but controls them. This is symbolized by his locks of braided or matted hair. bKra shis rgyal mtshan explains:

> Long hair (*skra ral pa*) is a mark of power (*byin rlabs*) for Tantric professionals and Treasure revealers. It's their mark of noncelibacy. Monks (*grwa ba rab byung*) have their hair cut as a mark of renunciation of mundane life (*'jig rten 'tsho ba*). On the contrary, Tantric professionals (*sngags pa*)

[609] Obeyesekere (1981).
[610] Lang (1995: 32), Obeyesekere (1981: 38-50), Leach (1958: 148-55).
[611] Lang (1995: 33).
[612] Obeyesekere (1981: 45).

let their hair grow and never cut it to preserve the power hair represents. Additionally, long hair on Tantric practitioners is also an emblem (*rtags*) of their practice of the skillful means (*thabs lam*).[613]

Therefore, long hair preserves the hedonistic quality of a Tantric figure's masculinity and never having it cut preserves the power hair represents, which is the practice of the *thabs lam*, the path of skillful means. The *thabs lam* and its immediately related practice, the *grol lam* (path of liberation), are both meditative techniques essential to the perfection phase (*rdzogs rim*) system of Mahāyoga.[614] According to Nyi zla he ruka, the hair of the *sngags pa* is neglected and left unwashed, uncombed, uncut, and unshaved primarily because the Tantric yogis tend to spend long periods of time in meditation and their hair forms interlocked coils that are not cut and are called meditation hair (*mtshams skra*).[615] In this case, therefore, the hair comes to assume a symbolic meaning deriving from a practical reason, that of being unable to take care of personal hygiene while sitting in meditation for extended periods of time.

Next to the matted hair another article immediately associated with such a religious status, as suggested by the name of the religious class, is the white dress (*gos dkar*, Skt. *avadātavasana*).[616] This is the typical outfit of the non-celibate Tantric community, and it stands in opposition to the traditional saffron or maroon (*ngur smrig*) robe of the monastic community. Although many non-celibate Tantric professionals (*sngags pa*) do wear maroon or red colored robes, the most typical Tantric attire in Tibet, or even in Nepal, is a white lower garment combined with a white and red shawl (*gzan*). In the TsM the white garment (*ras dkar*) is associated with another central discipline practiced by the Tantric adept, the *rtsa rlung* exercises, and therefore the generation of inner blissful heat (*bde drod*) or fierce blissful heat (*gtum mo'i bde drod*).[617] This is a yogic process performed through the manipulation of channels (*rtsa*), winds (*rlung*), and seminal nuclei (*thig le*), which are linked to the notion of the subtle or illusory

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[613] bKra shis rgyal msthan's oral communication. rDza mer chen monastery, Shar mda', Nang chen (Yushu TAP), August 2004.

[614] See Gyurme Dorje's interesting study on the Guhyagarbha Tantra (*gsang ba'i snying po*) recently published on the Website of Wisdom Books at http://www.wisdom-books.com/ReadingRoom.asp. On the notion of *thabs lam* Gyurme Dorje writes: "The meditative stability of the perfection stage includes the path of skilful means (*thabs lam*) by which the energy channels, currents of vital energy and points of seminal energy (*rtsa rlung thig le*) in the subtle body are controlled and the coalescent path of liberation (*grol lam*), which concerns non-conceptualizing yoga and is effected in three steps: willfully applied meditation, otherwise known as the yoga of blessings, effective meditation, also known as the yoga of the imaginary, and instantaneous meditation, also known as the yoga of perfection."

[615] Nyi zla he ru ka (2003: 88).

[616] According to Lamotte (1958: 72), the Sanskrit term *avadātavasana* refers to the white robe or white garment worn by householder (*gṛhin* or *gṛhapati*) lay Buddhist practitioners (Skt. *upāsaka*).

[617] In the *Bod brda'i tshig mdzod* the Tibetan expression *gos dkar* or *gos dkar can* is immediately associated with the non-celibate practitioner and therefore with *khyim pa*, *mi skya* or even *mi nag*, i.e. lay man. Brag g.yab (1989).

body (*sgyu lus*). According to Nyi zla he ru ka, the white robe of the Tantric yogis can be noticed above all in the shawl (*gzan*), which tends to be white in the middle and red at the sides to represent the inseparability of method and wisdom (*thabs shes dbyer med*).[618] The choice of a white shawl (*gzan dkar*) is particularly favored by those Tantric adepts who practice the instructions of the *rsta rlung* since the shawl represents the blazing of the inner heat (*gtum mo*), the essence of the generation phase (*rdzogs rim*).[619]

I believe the TsM can be read as an attempt to promote the figure of the non-celibate Tantric adepts by providing a structural framework to attain and to display the marks of the class of *gos dkar lcang lo* with the *dpa' chas bco lnga* ornaments. Each of the fifteen ornaments (*rgyan*) is associated with a specific mastery or achievement of the Tantric repertoire of the *gos dkar lcang lo'i sde*.

## *Hayagrīva Pills and the Yoga of Food*

In addition to his role as Treasure revealer at the center of a large variety of religious activities, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje is also a non-celibate Tantric professional (*sngags pa*) who performs various apotropaic activities and rituals for the protection, welfare, and health of his community including divination, weather control, healing, recitations of prayers, and the circulation of amulets. Villagers, nomads, and pilgrims in addition to monks and spiritual leaders of the area regularly ask for the old teacher's advice, spiritual support, and instructions concerning a variety of issues.

One of the most frequent requests for bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's advice concerns health matters. Among bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's claimed charismatic skills are healing and the manufacture of medicinal pills, or blessed *maṇi* pills. In Tibetan culture, a charismatic healer, or *lha rje*, is not a formal physician in the Western sense of the word, nor an individual necessarily familiar with the complex theories of Tibetan traditional medicinal science (*gso rig pa*). Rather, some Treasure revealers and Tantrikas claim to have developed specialized healing powers and skills that they can offer to their community. In Tibetan tradition and popular belief, realized beings and incarnate lamas such as bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje are believed to have intrinsic power

[618] Nyi zla he ru ka (2003: 87).
[619] Nyi zla he ru ka (2003: 87).

over the mundane world, which includes thaumaturgic control over human sickness. Their power over the human karmic condition can fundamentally nullify attacks of sickness and common pains. This thaumaturgic power is sought through the physical application of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s touch, saliva, and breath on the person’s wounded and sick body. However, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje also produces a series of consecrated pills that devotees value both for their spiritual energy and their medicinal properties in the treatment of various ailments.

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje is not, and does not claim to be a doctor or a physician (*sman pa*), as this appellation would usually define someone with a formal and comprehensive medical education. Rather, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s healing powers have spiritual rather than medical roots. Although many devotees who visit bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje hope to receive some guidance and assistance in solving health related problems, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje only gives blessings, blows on the devotee, and offers a small handful of his consecrated pills. In addition, if the person is in need of medical care he would encourage him/her to go to a doctor or to the hospital.

When not in rigorous retreat, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje spends most of his time reciting mantras, practicing short meditation sessions, and performing rituals for his monastic and lay community. Devotees and pilgrims request his services every day. Generally, people seek bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s spiritual advice and thaumaturgic and prognostication skills. Devotees enter bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s room, prostrate at his feet, and reverentially sit on the floor waiting for him to speak. The palms of their hands united in prayer and often with tears in their eyes, the pilgrim is in front of the sacred incarnate, a human manifestation of the power of wisdom and devotion. At bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s request, the devotee tells him the reasons why s/he is visiting. Most of the time, pilgrims request divinations or prognostications of some sort. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje then asks their name (*rang ming*), family lineage (*rus pa*), and astrological sign (*lo rtags*) before he begins the divinatory reading of his prayer beads. His response to a specific question or to the solution of a problem usually comes in the form of pragmatic advice and it is usually accompanied by one or a series of recommendations, advice, or recitations for the devotee to perform. If the person suffers from illness or confusion, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje will intuit from the divination the degree of psycho-physical defilement (*sgrib*) afflicting the individual. It is common for bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje to recommend a series of liturgical rituals such as ablutions and recitations to remove the obscurations that need to be cleansed and purified by both physical and mental/spiritual means. He often blows air or

water/saliva (*lce bul*) on the wounded or affected area and bestows a short blessing ritual to the person by touching the person's body and head with his own ritual dagger or with sacred water. In some cases, when the illness or the physical problem is a serious one, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje suggests to devotees that in addition to his blessing they should seek treatment in a hospital or see a doctor. However, many people seek his blessing and curative attentions, including people with back or chest pain, rheumatic problems, men with abrasions on their limbs or cuts on their hands, and girls with rashes on their shoulders or burns on their arms. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's curing power is not spectacular; apart from blowing on the patient's suffering body part, reciting a mantra, and dispersing a little bag with his consecrated pills, he does not offer any other solution to a devotee's problem. His divinatory skills and healing power are nevertheless the main reasons why common people group often with their children in front of his door, patiently waiting and hoping for an audience.

Tibetans bring their children to the lama for various reasons. In a land still affected by a high mortality rate among young children and where many women die in childbirth, the blessings and auspicious protection of a lama are important. Tibetan parents feel a special sense of responsibility regarding the social and spiritual welfare of their children. To ensure such benefits and guarantee their children's wellbeing it is necessary for them to establish a relationship with a Buddhist master when the child is young. They bring their newborn infants to ask bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje for a name. The name so acquired is considered particularly auspicious for the child. It establishes a relationship with the old master, and it will protect them as if guarded by the lama's power.

bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's spiritual healing powers come from two sources. Because he was recognized as a manifestation of the healer sMan pa Kun dga' nyi ma, the legendary companion of King Ge sar of gLing in many adventures, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje is believed to have retained some elements of Kun dga' nyi ma's thaumaturgic knowledge.[620] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje regularly accepts devotees and provides aid for the solution of health-related matters and considers his spiritual link with sMan pa Kun dga' nyi ma fundamental to his role as a healer. In addition to his charismatic healing powers, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje claims also to have acquired the knowledge to produce a type of medicine pill (*sman ril*), which is considered by many as a cure-all. In the literature such as bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's *Gab gsal lag len*, these

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[620] sMan pa Kun dga' nyi ma appears in various stories about gLing Ge sar's adventures. See my discussion in the first section of Chapter 4.

pellets are often referred to as a panacea or as a "single medicine for a hundred diseases" (*nad brgya sman gcig*) and are manufactured in a ritual environment following specific medicine *sādhanās* (*sman sgrub*) that have been revealed as Treasure texts inspired by the deity Hayagrīva.[621] In these rituals, the substances are consacrated and thus acquire the capacity to infuse their spiritual energy into the faithful and even to spur liberation after having been ingested (*myong grol*).

The association between Treasure revelation and healing/medicine is not unusual but rather common in the history of Tibetan Buddhism.[622] Among the active Treasure revealers in Tibet today are a number of renowned healers such as mThu ldan rdo rje (b. 1941) in 'Jig 'dril (rNga ba) and gTer ston lHa rgyal dBang drags rol pa'i rdo rje (also known as lHa rgyal rin po che, b. n.a.) in Padma (mGo log). The healing quality of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's religiosity has developed from his spiritual achievements in combination with his Treasure revelations. One of the many activities bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje is known for is the ability to perform special contemplation practices concerned with the production and consumption of alchemical pills or the extraction of essences (*bcud len*). These capsules are known by the name of *rTa mgrin ril bu* (*Hayagrīva* pills) from the name of the deity, rTa mgrin (Hayagrīva) with whose revealed teachings their production and ritual consumption are associated.

There are a number of Treasure scriptures explaining and describing the production and use of *bcud len* within bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's collected Treasures. The third volume of his collected *dgongs gter* teachings contains a cycle centered on rTa mgrin, the *Hūm chen kā ra'i thugs tig las rta mgrin rdo rje me char*.[623] Another set of ritual texts focusing on the production of *bcud len* are included in a cycle of Treasure teachings (*gter chos skor*) highlighting rites of propitiations (*sgrub skor*) devoted to the deity Loktṛpāla, one of the main deities belonging to the practices of dMod pa drag sngags from the group of the Grub pa bka' brgyad.[624]

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[621] Cf. Stearns (2007: 23).

[622] See, for instance, Janet Gyatso's "Thinking about Buddhism and Medicine: Reflections from some Tibetan Cases." Paper given in occasion of the XVth Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, June 23-28, 2008.

[623] For a list of *dgongs gter* texts revealed by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje see Appendix Three at the end of this volume. For an overview of the practices of *bcud len* within the rNying ma school see Germano (1997a).

[624] The list of the Grub pa bka' brgyad as provided to me by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje corresponds to the one in the *Blue Annals* in Roerich (1988: 106). These are: 'Jam dpal sku, Padma gsung, Yang dag thugs, bDud rtsi yon tan, Phur pa 'phrin las, 'Jig rten mchod bstod, Ma mo rbod gtong, and dMod pa drag sngags. From the doctrinal point of view the Grub pa bka' brgyad class of deities is fundamental in the discourse of *gter* revelation. The majority of the *gter*-transmitted teachings are in fact propitiatory rites (*sādhanā*) concerned with the deities of these classes.

The rubric *bcud len* (extraction of vital essences) defines a set of ritual practices concerned with the use, ingestion, and transformation of specific nutritional substances including herbs and minerals during ritualized contemplative sessions in order to sustain the practitioner's life in circumstances of prolonged sessions of intense yogic practices.[625] The performance of such a ritual ingestion of energetic substances seems to be more than just a yogic practice *per se*. In fact, the practice of *bcud len* is believed to be also effective in extending life (*'chi med tshe'i bcud len*), and is considered to be specifically efficient in healing. The *Gab gsal lag len* (The Practice of Unveiling the Secret), one of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje Treasure texts on the subject, reports that as a universal panacea or "single medicine for a hundred diseases" (*nad brgya sman gcig*) the *bcud len* is a remedy to many ills including cancer (*skran rigs*).[626] The consumption of *bcud len* pills produced within a ritual environment can be performed in various circumstances associated with contemplative practices, such as in meditation retreat, long meditative sessions, and specific fasting practices (*myung gnas*).[627]

Ritual activities and yogic techniques such as the *bcud len* or the generation of dietary supplements in the context of Tibetan Tantric practices and esoteric textual traditions have been an object of study only recently.[628] Germano has provided some introductory remarks about these "alchemical practices," especially contextualized in the system of the Seminal Heart (*snying thig*) organized by kLong chen rab 'byams pa (1308-1363). In his article, Germano focuses primarily on one aspect of the *bcud len* practice, which is the consumption of one's own energies, or "eating winds."[629] Here we will analyze another aspect of the practice that is more "substantial," namely the consumption of pills made of various ingredients whose purpose is also to support the practitioner's biological needs in times of intense contemplation. In Tibet today as in the past such food-related yogic practices constitute an important aspect of religion, and at bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's community the practice is popular.

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As for bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revealed texts concerned with the *bcud len* belonging to the propitiatory rites (*sgrub thabs*) to Loktṛpāla, the principal one is to be found as number 25 in Volume VII of his collected revealed texts under the title *Drang srong loktri'i sgrib skor man ngag khol byung las tshe bcud ril bu'i dmigs rim 'od zer drwa ba.*

[625] Germano (1997a).

[626] GSLL, f. 1a.

[627] bKra shis rgyal mtshan's oral communication. Ri phu kha mountain hermitage, sKye rgu mdo, Yushu TAP, August 2001.

[628] Germano (1997a).

[629] Germano (1997a: 296).

Among bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s revealed Treasures are the *bCud len dmigs rim ’od zer drwa ba ’chi med srog sgrub* (“The Matrix of Rays of Light that Ever Remains: Series of Concentrations for the Extraction of Vital Essences”), *Nyi zla kha sbyor gyi cha lag rlung khrid tshe bcud kun ’dus* (“The Gathering of the Nectar of Long Life: A Manual about Winds that is Auxiliary to the Union of Sun and Moon”), and the *Zab gsang yang tig nyi zla kha sbyor las gab gsal lag len shel dkar me long* (“A Crystal Mirror of The Practice of Unveiling the Secret of the Sun and Moon’s Profoundly Secret and Quintessential Union”). These three complex texts describe and give instruction on how to produce and consume *bcud len* pills.[630] The *Zab gsang yang tig nyi zla kha sbyor las gab gsal lag len shel dkar me long* (also called *Gab gsal lag len*, henceforth GSLL), both for its length, four folios, and clearness of exposition is particularly apt for a brief introduction of this activity as proposed by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. In the colophon the author informs the reader that the GSLL, an instruction manual for the production of *bcud len* pills, was originally received in the form of a series of pure visions (*dag snang*). It was then written down and composed as a sort of memorandum (*brjed tho*) by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje on the specific request of rDo rje bkra shis, one of his closest disciples.[631]

Although beginning with a quotation from a Treasure text referring to Padmasambhava, in the colophon of the GSLL the text itself does not reproduce any final assertion about its pure vision nature and the way it was revealed.[632] The only visual element that identifies the scripture as a pure vision (*dag snang*) teaching is the presence of the characteristic orthographical device and interval mark, similar to a double-comma, at the end of each verse.[633] In the GSLL, the practice of producing these essences is directly associated with the practice of *rdzogs chen* contemplation. In particular, *bcud len* seem to fit in the eclectic series of exercises and yogic performances meant to heighten the practitioner’s perception. It also provides the practitioner with the necessary experiential background during the practices of the essential path of generation and completion (*bskyed rdzogs lam gyi snying po*). The GSLL compares the

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[630] Respectively numbers 34, 35, and 36 of Volume III according to the list of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s revealed teachings at the end of this volume.

[631] […] *rdo rje bkris* [= *bkra shis*] *don gnyer phyir/ mi smyon pra bhas brjed tho tsam te bris//* GSLL, f. 4a.

[632] bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s personal communication. August 2000.

[633] The status given to pure visions (*dag snang*) as a transmission methods within the rNying ma tradition is quite complex. Technically speaking pure visions are usually very similar to mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*) in the way they manifest. See Thondup (1986: 61-62). The distinction between *dag snang* and *dgongs gter* is indeed subtle. It is not uncommon to find teachers according the same value and characteristics to these two kinds of transmission. It is worth noting that bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s perception of the issue is in many ways quite clear since he revealed his spiritual texts as both mind Treasures (*dgongs gter*) and pure visions (*dag snang*). He refers to both of them as Treasures (*gter kha*). See previous chapter for my discussion of *dag snang* and *dgongs gter*.

innermost nature of *rdzogs chen* teachings and the supporting power of the extraction of essences to signify a unity of purpose and to highlight the *bcud len*'s aid in the achievement of liberation. According to the GSLL:

> The very secret and supreme system of the oral teachings of Padma[sambhava], the *A ti snying thig* or Great Perfection of the resplendent seminal heart, is the perfect essence of knowledge just in one single drop, so that the profound practice can ripen and liberate in this very same life. Practice the essence of the path of generation and completion in union with this recipient of innermost essence. *sa ma ya*.[634]

The *bcud len* pills described in the GSLL are complex calcium-containing compounds. The GSLL specifies that this universal panacea (*nad brgya sman gcig*), which is the extract of essences of the ambrosia (*bdud rtsi'i bcud len*), is made of precious stones such as diamond (*rin chen pha lam*), gold (*gser*), silver (*dngul*), iron (*lcags*), copper (*zangs*), and mercury (*dngul chu*) in various quantities.[635] The text warns that particular attention should be devoted to the purification of such ingredients before employing them. The mixture also requires other ingredients, such as the traditional "three whites and the three sweets" and a series of other components including various roots, plants, and herbs.[636]

The GSLL emphasizes that among the various benefits produced by the practice of *bcud len* are long life (*tshe ring*), curing sickness (*nad sel*), enhancing physical strength (*lus stobs*), and improving the symptoms of old age (*sgar sra*).[637] It also establishes nutritional essences (*dwangs ma*) and provides a fine complexion (*sha bkra*). Providing strength, the *bcud len* is believed to increase the level of bodily activity and cures the unbalance between air, bile, and phlegm, the three main constituents of the human body according to traditional Indian and Tibetan medicine. The five powders (gold, silver, copper, iron, and mercury) are believed to provide protection from planetary gods (*gza'*), *nāga* (*klu*), and evil spirits (*'byung po*) by

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[634] *padma'i zhal lung yang gsang bla med lugs/*
*'od gsal snying thig a ti rdzogs pa che/*
*kun bzang dgongs bcud thig la nyag gcig pu/*
*zab mo nyams len tshe 'dir grol smin phyir/*
*yang gsang snying po gwa'u [= ga'u] kha sbyor 'dis/*
*bskyed rdzogs lam gyi snying po 'di 'bad/*
*sa ma ya /*
GSLL, f. 1b.
[635] GSLL, f. 1a.
[636] GSLL, f. 2a. *dkar gsum* (the three whites): *zho* (curd), *'o ma* (milk), and *mar* (butter). While *mngar gsum* (the three sweets) are: *ka ra* (sugar), *bu ram* (molasses), and *sbrang rtsi* (honey).
[637] GSLL, f. 3a

removing various poisons that cause obscuration and illness. Another benefit achieved with the ingestion of *bcud len* pills is the elimination of dizziness (*rmug 'thib*) and tumors (*skran*). The GSLL claims that on a physical level the *bcud len* not only slows the degeneration of the body by providing strength (*lus dbang nyams pa gso*) and generating long life (*tshe ring stobs skyed*), but it also increases the diffusion of bliss heat (*bde drod*) when combined with the practice of channel and winds (*rtsa rlung*).[638] Thus the practice of *bcud len* aids also in the practice of another form of yoga, that of the *gtum mo* or the generation of inner heat.

The religious discourse to which the *bcud len* belong is *rdzogs chen*. These substances are to be produced in the specific ritual and contemplative environment of *rdzogs chen* in order to produce the expected results. Again in the GSLL we read:

> The medicinal extraction of essences is like the single knowledge that liberates all. They are essences that enhance all the senses suppressing the illnesses of the six hollow organs. Once dissolved, they remove disorder in a sick body.[639]

The religious implications of the practice of *bcud len* and the ritual manufacture and distribution of blessed *ma ṇi* pills represent a complex aspect of Tibetan Buddhist contemplation techniques and require more study. Among the many yogic practices associated with *rdzogs chen*, those involving *bcud len* and other food-related ingestions are considered aids to removal of food-fixation blockages and achievement of spiritual liberation.[640] Additionally, requesting, receiving, and ingesting pills from a revered religious master provides the follower with the opportunity to reaffirm his/her membership in the sphere of the master and thus reinforces a sense of identity,

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[638] *lag len don khel nus pa'i yon tan ni/*
*tshe ring nad sel rgas sra lus stobs 'phel/*
*dwang [= dwangs] ma gnas 'jog sha bskrag [= skra] chags pa dang/*
*stobs bskyed rtsal kyang mi nyams gong 'phel nas/*
*rlung mkhris bad kan 'du ba mi nyoms gso/*
*thal ba lnga yis gza'klu 'byung po'i gdon/*
*grib dang rtsa nad gyur dug sna tshogs sel/*
*dus nad rtsar rgyug rmug 'thib 'dras skran zhi/*
*tshe ring stobs bskyed lus dbang nyams pa gso/*
*bcud len mchog gyur rtsa rlung bde drod 'phel/*
GSLL, f. 3a.

[639] *snod drug nad 'joms dbang po kun gsal rdzas/*
*bsdu bsgrubs nad ldan kyi 'du 'khrugs sel/*
*gcig shes kun grol sman gyi bcud len no/*
GSLL, f. 4a. I decided to translate the expression *bsdu bsgrubs* with "dissolve" in accordance to bKra shis mtsho mo's explanation and advice. Ri phug kha hermitage, Mount gNas chen padma (Yushu TAP), Qinghai, August 2000. The six hollow organs (*snod drug*) are the stomach (*pho ba*), intestines (*rgya ma*), abdomen (*long ga*), bile bag (*mkhris thum*), bladder (*lgang pa*), and vesicle of regeneration (*bsam se'u*).

[640] Germano (1997).

community, and loyalty to the teacher. In such a process, the altruistic, benevolent, and protective power of the Buddhist master transcends the symbolic action of spiritual support and becomes the quintessential agent in the devotees' desired soteriological transformation.

In the last section we will continue to explore the role of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje in his community and especially his strong presence among his devotees through the distribution of other materials linked to soteriological and protective powers.

### *Mu tig tsa tsa: bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's Protective Amulets*

In Asia, the cult of Buddhist amulets, blessed articles, and sanctified images is very old.[641] In Tibet, the request, reception, and display of blessed amulets including effigies of the Buddha, images and relics of influential teachers and masters, protective cords and necklaces, and charm boxes is an ancient tradition that is still popular today. With the influence of new technologies, pictorial images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, computerized portraits and collages of contemporary Buddhist masters, and digitalized photos have added new materials to a world already populated with sacred items and artifacts.

The devotee visiting bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje would like to receive some of the Buddhist master's blessed items known for their protective and auspicious power such as small paper bags containing his "Hayagrīva pills." As we have seen above, these consecrated herbal and mineral pellets are believed to act as remedies for many diseases and also to provide assistance in gaining spiritual realization for the serious and faithful practitioner. If the situation requires more attention, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje includes blessed cords and protective wheel talismans meant to be added to the devotee's personal reliquary purse (*ga'u*), which Tibetans wear as a necklace or around their bodies.

However, every Tibetan who visits the old teacher would like to possess one of his *mu tig tsa tsa*, or devotional "clay pearls." These are small clay forms made from a brass mould in the shape of two circular cones united at the base. The *mu tig tsa tsa* are said to represent Zangs mdog dpal ri, the Glorious Copper Colored Mountain and pure land abode of Padmasambhava. The *mu tig tsa tsa* are prepared in accordance with bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's visionary experiences. The clay employed to manufacture the talismans is mixed with the earth of various

[641] See for instance Stanley Tambiah's classic work on the cult of amulets in Thailand (1984).

Treasure places he has visited including the area around Nyag bla sgar.[642] For the manufacture of the *mu tig tsa tsa*, the clay is kneaded by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's closest monastic disciples. The *mu tig tsa tsa* are then shaped with the mold and baked in the wood stove in bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's private room in his presence. During the cooking period bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and a few of his monastics recite prayers. When the *mu tig tsa tsa* are ready, a consecration ritual is performed (*rab gnas*) and their potency enriched by sprinkling them with blessed water and touching them with bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's ritual dagger that he retrieved as a Treasure.

The *mu tig tsa tsa* are considered particularly powerful talismans, hence their wearers carry them on their persons attached to blessed cords that they tie around their necks or string onto a necklace. They are thought to bring protection and good fortune and are believed to be imbued with the blessing power of the old master who has consecrated them. Before offering the amulets to his devotees, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje grabs the *mu tig tsa tsa*, holds and rolls them in his hands, recites prayers, and blows his breath on them thus transmitting more of his virtues and power to the amulets and increasing their potency. Practically every Tibetan including children in the Nang chen and sKye rgu mdo areas who has met bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and is one of his followers can be recognized by the *mu tig tsa tsa* amulets tied around their necks.

The subject of *mu tig tsa tsa* amulets represents an important aspect of Tibetan popular religion and the enthusiasm of those wearing them is proof of the interest in such a custom and respect for the mystic who offered them. It also embodies a specific religious identity and imagined community that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's clientele construct. They are external signs of belonging to this community, "reminders" of the master's presence, activities, and guidance, and at the same time they are agents of active social practices, much in the same fashion as the veneration of Buddhist relics.[643] As *tsa tsa* (sometimes spelled *tsha tsha*[644]) or a small votive clay icons, the *mu tig tsa tsa* belong to the Tibetan category of Buddhist effigies and relics. They are figures (*gzugs brnyan*) traditionally manufactured with clay and sometimes grain coming in different forms and sizes and usually serving as a form of offering to sacred places and religious sites including mountain passes, lakes, stūpas, and temples. However, blessed *tsa tsa* are also carried on the person, or stored in charm boxes (*ga'u*), and sometimes are displayed on home altars as an act of respect for the religious figure, deity, bodhisattva or Buddha they represent and

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[642] Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje manufactured similar talismans for his community.
[643] Germano (2004a: 52).
[644] The *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen po* reports the spelling *tsha tsha*.

embody. *Tsa tsa* can thus represent anything from images of the Buddha or masters to deities and bodhisattvas, stūpas, and so forth. The *tsa tsa* are consecrated items that are believed to store the power and especially the blessing presence of the Buddhist master who has manufactured them. In this they are similar to Buddhist relics, which symbolize the Buddha's life, attainments, and powers. The *mu tig tsa tsa* are, using Tambiah's words, "fields of merit," embedded with bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's Buddhist attributes and spiritual achievements.[645] The *mu tig tsa tsa* thus represent the unique relationship between the soil hosting the Treasure and the religious person who "opened" its hidden door, the Treasure revealer. They are reminders of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's advice, instructions, and spiritual support for the devotees who wear them. They inspire their possessor to recall his/her religious commitments, ethical behavior, and devotion towards their master. They are also a means to affirm cultural identity, a sense of religious community, and loyalty to their spiritual leader.

There is no devotee of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje who does not carry a *mu tig tsa tsa* around his/her neck. Additionally, those closest to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje proudly guard filings from his nails, strands of his white hair, and pieces of his clothes in their reliquary purses. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's items and *mu tig tsa tsa* are considered with utmost respect among his followers. They represent the teacher's presence, the transmission of his virtuous potency (*byin rlabs*) and also the devotee's sincere expression of devotion towards his master. The *mu tig tsa tsa*, and likewise any other "relics" produced by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje are said to create "great benefits" since the sick person believes they will help to heal him or her, the devout to accumulate merits, the traveler to be protected along the way of his pilgrimage, and the parent to guard his or her offspring.

## *Concluding Remarks*

One of the main issues of this chapter has been the exploration of the *rTa 'grin rdo rje me char*, the cycle of Treasures that characterizes bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's primary role as revealer. The collection epitomizes his connection with Tibet's past and also his expertise and role as a messenger of Padmasambhava. His collection of Treasure includes the typical triadic structure of *bla rdzogs thugs* as prescribed by tradition where the revelations are organized according to

[645] Tambiah (1984: 200-201).

cycles associated with the lama or Padmasambhava, *rdzogs chen*, and the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, i.e. Thugs rje chen po (Skt. Mahākāruṇika). bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revelations also include many other kinds of rituals that address more pragmatic applications. These collections of *mantra*s (*sngags 'bum*) are meant to improve a number of yogic skills such as swift walking (*rkang mgyogs*), longevity practices (*tshe sgrub*), and the extraction of elements (*bcud len*), but they also included ransom rites (*glud gdos*), life summoning rituals (*bla 'gugs*), and feast offerings (*tshogs mchod*).

The 'Path of effortlessness,' or *rtsol med*, contained in the TsM offers an important introduction to the initiation of the non-celibate Tantric practitioner. The TsM initiand's newly acquired status as a non-celibate Tāntrika is portrayed as a path to enlightenment where not only does the adept vow to practice and accomplish specific doctrines, namely *rdzogs chen*, but also to display a series of emblems or regalia (*rgyan*) that represent each skill and achievement (fulfilled or to be fulfilled) of the practitioner. I was immediately drawn to this text in 1997 when I met bKra shis rgyal mtshan and Tshe bzang bsam gling rin po che in Lhasa. When I asked what kind of texts bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje had revealed so far, their immediate answer was "there are many, but one is the *rTsol med*."[646] The reason of my fascination for this text is that it concerns the heart of the notion of religious identity. The fifteen emblems the text describes are to be carried always on the body of the non-celibate Tantric adept and to be displayed as marks of greatness (*che rtags*). Additionally, being associated with the glorious past of imperial Tibet and the period of the Early Translations of Buddhist scriptures, they constitute one of the major attempts of the Treasure tradition to preserve a link between Tibet's religious past and future.

Among the many facets of Treasure revelation is the introduction of fresh material for the devotee's spiritual advancement and also material support. Materiality is an important element in revelation. As we have seen, one of the recurrent characteristics of Treasure revealers is their involvement in religious or charismatic healing practices, therapeutic thaumaturgy, and the production of charms of talismanic power. Just as in the past, today's Treasure revealers are often skilled in traditional medicine and pharmacology, and many of their revelations produce medical texts and manuals for the preparation of medicinal remedies. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's *rta mgrin ril bu* or Hayagrīva pills and his alchemical pills or essence extract (*bcud len*) inspired by deities such as Hayagrīva are examples of such an aspect of Treasure revelation. Produced

[646] bKra shis rgyal mtshan, oral communication. Lhasa, Shol gsar pa, June 1997.

according to the instructions contained in a series of text revealed in the form of mind Treasure (*dgongs gter*), the extractions of elements are meant to support a practitioner's nourishment during times of intense contemplation. Additionally, the concept of ingesting essential energies, either in the material form of pills and juices or in the more intangible aspect of winds (*rlung*), elaborates on the idea of detachment from the mundane world, in this case from food, and enhances yogic advancement.

The production of apotropaic articles such as the *rta mgrin ril bu* is much appreciated by devotees and disciples alike who regularly visit bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje with the hope of increasing their merit and curing ills. In return for their sincere devotion and veneration, the master offers a token of his appreciation in the form of a blessing (*byin rlabs*) demonstrating his gratefulness and spiritual assistance. In this sense the *rta mgrin ril bu* and the *mu tig tsa tsa* belong to the broad category of saintly relics or *ring srel*, which, as Dan Martin has demonstrated, do not necessarily refer only to bodily remains in the traditional sense of the word.[647] Receiving these precious blessed pills and protective talismans is associated with the guarantee of a degree of spiritual protection and physical well-being for the devotee and a step further towards liberation. They are also markers of a well-defined sense of cultural and religious identity and membership in a distinctive social community.

[647] Martin (1996: 278-79).

# Conclusions: bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s Legacy

The life of Tibetan Treasure revealers in contemporary Tibet deserves scholarly attention because their activities represent a vibrant facet of religious revival. In order to explore this phenomenon, this study has integrated an historical perspective on Treasure revelation with an overview of the challenges brought about by the current political environment in Tibet. I have grounded this study by focusing on the life and activities of one Treasure revealer in contemporary Tibet, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. Not only did I give an overview of his revelations, but I also explored how Treasure revelation and the worship of *gter ma* items and teachings claim meaning in modern Tibet.

By exploring the world, the life, and the activities of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje we have realized that there is a great continuity between present-day Treasure revealers and those of the eleventh century. The essential ideals underlying the tradition are the same, namely, the retrieval of supposedly ancient manuscripts in a ritual context that can authenticate and at the same time legitimate contemporary religious practices and spiritual traditions. Additionally, Buddhist masters such as bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje are particularly interesting because they have witnessed the transition from a traditional Tibetan society to becoming a part of the rapidly modernizing PRC. They therefore are well situated to offer us a glimpse of the social, religious, and political transformations of this tubolent period of human history. Throughout the flux of the twenty-first century it is remarkable to see how charismatic leaders such as bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje continue to administer to their religious communities via traditional religious practices despite these times of rapid change and modernization.

bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje has spent a life on pilgrimage in continual interaction with the soil of Tibet, material or ethereal, extracting religious items and revealing sacred scriptures. The network of residences and mountain hermitages he established testify to a life devoted to an incessant dialogue with village communities and Buddhist monasteries investing in “geological loyalties,” that is, the personal commitment to renew and solidify the relationship between the land of Tibet and its inhabitants. In doing so, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje developed a diverse network of sacred places and hidden valleys by excavating sacred items, revealing mental Treasures, and marking rocks associated with his revelations with his foot prints (*zhabs rjes*), thus sanctifying the environment, renewing local cults, and enjoying local economic patronage.

I would call this attitude the "ecology of revelation" as I think it represents the interaction between man and nature; a typical and central element of Tibetan religious sensibility. Tibetan Buddhism has thus created a distinctive culture where selected people become recipients of transmitted knowledge by becoming one with their environment. The soil and the sky of Tibet thus offer and produce sacred objects of inestimable spiritual value. The lives of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and of his disciples bKra shis rgyal mtshan and his wife dPal chen lha mo are dedicated to the communication and interaction with the ethereal world of local deities, *ḍākinīs*, and sacred vultures who become the mediators between the land and the Tibetan people. In these interactions, the Treasure revealer becomes the intermediary between the past, the golden era of Tibetan civilization, and the present. Tibetans expect Treasure revealers to extract Treasures from the soil of Tibet as an act of confirming the existence of a past that is still present, a continuity of an imagined and idealized dimension where Tibetan civilization is not threatened but still flourishes, giving hope for a good present and an even better future.

Although more needs to be done to fully understand the mechanisms behind the identification of an actual Treasure revealer, the study of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life has nevertheless helped us frame a possible scenario. First of all prophetic dreams and visions have a pivotal function in an individual's understanding of his or her role in the religious world. Dreams and visions are very much a cultural element endemic to Tibetan indigenous beliefs. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje narrates the vicissitudes of his life in the style of other Treasure revealers, by emphasizing prophetic visions and pivotal meetings with prominent masters who recognized his talents and announced his mission. Despite the radical changes and the continual transformations of his land under Chinese control, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's reconnection with the mythic and glorious past of imperial Tibet never ceases to emerge in his revelations and writings.

In this sense, in his autobiographical writings bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje appears as the archetype of Padmasambhava's messenger, the Treasure revealer par excellence for whom visions, prophetic dreams, encounters with *ḍākinīs*, and studies with prominent teachers announced his mystic and visionary career. His narrative is as normatively linear as it is replete with the soteriological stages of his religious path. It also conveys the dramatized scenario of his self-quest and the need for legitimacy that Treasure revealers must obtain in order to "reveal" their teachings. Never rejecting the value of his heritage, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje resolutely reaffirms his belief in the past, his attachment to tradition, and the importance of his mission.

The second factor enhancing bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s status as a Treasure revealer is his recognition as a charismatic visionary and a virtuoso in Tantric practice by influential religious leaders. bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s studies with several prominent Buddhist teachers across the Tibetan plateau are reported in his autobiography, which not only reproduces the sources of his education and knowledge, but also serves as a foundation for his authority. In a society where lineage transmission is the major channel to traditional education, a Treasure revealer’s legitimacy is validated by being confirmed and approved by other affirmed authorities.

A third factor that has a particular influence on the recognition of a Treasure revealer is the moral and material support of a group of followers who reflect the impact of the Treasure revealer’s spiritual production and charismatic power. In this study I have shown how bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s sphere of action does not address monastics only but involves a larger lay religious community whose interests are often less abstract and more empirical. Religious materiality in the form of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s amulets, charms, and consecrated pills and the deployment of his personal charisma expressed via prognostications, blessings, and spiritual advice reaffirm the role of a Treasure revealer in the contemporary Tibetan culture as much as it helps to fill the historical gap created by the long and aggressive colonial rule.

This study has investigated some of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s major *gter ma* texts. In particular, we have examined two key *gter ma* manuscripts that are among the most representative of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s lineage: the *rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char gyi rtsol med gsang sngags myur lam* (The Effortless Quick Path of the Mantra according to rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char) and a group of texts devoted to the practice of the *bcud len* or “extraction of vital essences” represented by the *Gab gsal lag len* (The Practice of Unveiling the Secret). Through the study of these texts, two important features of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s lineage have emerged: one is the display of the so-called *dpa’ chas bco lnga*, or the “fifteen heroic emblems.” My conclusion is that these are central symbols that reflect bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s identity and sense of lineage continuity. By dressing in a certain way and wearing these ornaments through a ritualized initiation, the followers of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s practices emphasize their association with the path of the non-celibate Tantric professional. Especially important are two elements, long hair and white robes. While the first conveys the primary message of non-celibacy and, therefore, the transformation of sexually triggered energies into spiritually charged activities, the white robe is the symbol of the Tantric adept’s *gtum mo* or

inner heat, one of the most advanced yogic techniques conducive to the meditative states of enlightenment.

Additionally, through the study of ritual texts such as the *Gab gsal lag len*, we have been exposed to a major feature in the realm of material practice, namely, the production and ritual consumption of various consecrated pills, the *rta mgrin ril bu*. Here too I believe that such a ritual performance has been constructed for both religious professionals and lay believers. These pills can be ingested in a ritual context during the performance of specific fasting practices (*myung gnas*) associated with long meditation sessions and also by lay devotees who simply desire to receive some of the spiritual energy believed to imbue the pellets, to extend their lives, and to cure every kind of ill.

The study of the life of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and the Treasure tradition in present-day Tibet has exposed us also to the notion of a continuing presence of Buddhism through the revelation of fresh material items and spiritual scriptures. Although much has changed in Tibet's socio-political circumstances, there seems to be nothing particularly new in the idea of Treasure revelations today that did not exist in the past. The Treasure revealers' romantic notion of a continual presence of the Buddha or his manifestation as Padmasambhava provides the metaphysical ground for the belief in a constant renewal of spiritual support and of the temporal moral order through the service of their messengers, the Treasure revealers. Particularly in times of cultural alienation and political threat, the prophecy-based millenarian presence of Treasure revelations is well-suited for recreating religious identity and fostering faith in Buddhism and its leaders.[648] This is evident in the content of practices and instructions contained in large *gter ma* cycles such as the *Yang gsang rta mgrin rdo rje me char*, the corpus of bDe chen 'od gsal rod rje's *rdzogs chen*-based revelations. To begin with, the variety of deities, bodhisattvas, and gods that inspired most of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's revelations and visions reflects the need to nourish faith in Tibet's essential nature as a land of gods, spirits, and divine energies that are believed to deliberately determine its people's present and future. Furthermore, the complexity and assortment of practices such as the collection of *mantra*s (*sngags 'bum*) that improve a number of yogic skills such as swift walking (*rkang mgyogs*), longevity practices (*tshe sgrub*), extraction of elements (*bcud len*), ransom rites (*glud gdos*), life summoning (*bla 'gugs*), and

[648] Brawen-Dolma (1985).

feast offerings (*tshogs mchod*) reflect confidence in the power of religion and the importance of faith in a country where Tibetans are not given the right to control their future.[649]

The interaction between politics and religion in China is a sensitive issue that is being constantly monitored by scholars and specialists. Much of the Buddhist activities of today's religious charismatic leaders are deeply influenced by the post-Mao political authorities' attitudes towards ethnic minorities and religion. Recent policies applied by Chinese leaders and local authorities to religious institutions and monasteries have set a certain trend among monasteries and monastic communities. Encouraged to act self-sufficiently and having lost the prominent institutional position in Tibetan society they enjoyed in the past, monasteries have suffered major adversities while their monastic population has been dramatically reduced. However, political control over monasteries has not seemed to curb the religious fervor and determination of the Tibetan populace. Less institutionally controlled and more loosely organized mountain hermitages (*ri khrod*) and semi-monastic religious encampments (*chos sgar*) have flourished in the last decades, creating new spaces for traditional forms of education and study of religious practices. One of the most revealing phenomena linked to this trend is the development of *chos sgar* into large quasi-monastic entities that have grown out of the charismatic leadership of Treasure revealers such as the late mKhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs, Grub dang lung rtogs rgyal mtshan, and O rgyan sku gsum gling pa.

The tension between political control and religious freedom underlies the current socio-cultural dynamics in Tibet. The same tension, I believe, is also behind the renewed importance of the Treasure revelation movement as an attempt to reaffirm historical loyalties and to contradict social and ethnic alienation in the PRC. The Treasure revealer mediates between two separate but closely interconnected spheres, that of spiritual charisma and religious authority. Through the potency of his Treasure revelations and the authority conferred on him by various religious leaders, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje reconnects his disciples with their historical past, thus consolidating their religious identity and cultural legacy. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje offers himself not only as the traditional link between Tibet's past and the current need to safeguard Tibetan sense of religious identity, but also as an ideological force behind the contemporary renaissance of Buddhism in his land.

[649] Germano (1998: 90).

# Appendix One: *The Dance of the Immaculate Vajra*



***Rig 'dzin nus ldan rdo rje'i rnam thar bsdus pa dri med rdo rje'i zlos gar*** [650]

***The Dance of the Immaculate Vajra: A Brief Biography of Rig 'dzin nus ldan rdo rje.***[651]

**[f. 1b]** I praise and prostrate in reverence to Amitābha,[652] the absolute body[653]

Avalokiteśvara, the complete enjoyment body,

Padmasambhava, the emanation body,

The Awareness-Holder[654] dGa' rab rdo rje,[655]

'Jam dpal bshes gnyen,[656] Nāgārjuna,[657] and Hūṃ chen kā ra,[658]

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[650] Please see Text 2 in Appendix for the original text in transliteration.
[651] Nus ldan rdo rje, is an epithet of gTer chen bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje (b.1921).
[652] sNang mtha' (sNang ba mtha' yas, Skt. Amitābha). Amitābha is one of the five Buddha families (*rgyal ba rigs lnga*), together with Akṣobhya, Vairocana, Ratnasaṃbhava, and Amoghasiddhi). He is the Buddha whose manifestation (*sprul sku*, *nirmāṇakāya*) is Padmasambhava himself.
[653] *chos sku* (Skt. *dharmakāya*). "Reality body" or "Absolute body" is the first of threefold mode of existence (*sku gsum*) related to a Buddha that include also the "Enjoyment body" (*longs sku*; Skt. *sambhogakāya*), and the "Emanation body" (*sprul sku*; Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*). Thus *chos sku* refers to the primordial state of Buddha, the energy in its purest and imperceptible form. This compassionate energy, in order to be perceived and appreciated has developed in two further states or bodies (Skt. *rūpakāya*), the *longs sku*, which represents the enjoyment of Buddha nature, and its manifestation as luminosity and psychic energy. This state of existence often refers to the Bodhisattvas. The *sprul sku* instead is the actual emanation sphere of Buddha's physical forms where the psychic continuity of the primordial energy indicates their unobstructed and all-pervading power. It is in this state that the spiritual leaders are believed to actually perform compassionate deeds for the welfare of ordinary human beings.
[654] In Tibetan Buddhism *rig 'dzin*, abbreviation for *rig pa 'dzin pa*, is a title applied to those practitioners who have attained realization in the tantric system. Translation of the Sanskrit term *vidyādhara*, in English this term is usually rendered as "awareness-holder" or "knowledge-holder", and indicates a person's attainment (*'dzin pa*) of awareness or knowledge (*rig pa*). In the rNying ma tradition there are four different kind of awareness-holders, according to the different levels of attainement, *rnam par smin pa'i rig 'dzin* (Completely-Mature Vidyādhara); *tshe la dbang pa'i rig 'dzin* (a Vidyādhara with Control over Life); *phyag rgya chen po'i rig 'dzin* (Mahāmudra Vidyādhara); and the *lhun gyis grub pa'i rig 'dzin* (Spontaneously Manifested Vidyādhara).
[655] dGa' rab rdo rje (Skt. *Pramodavajra) is a semi-legendary figure credited with the earliest diffusion of the Great Perfection teachings in the human world. Tradition has it that he is the first human being to have actually been exposed to the teachings of *rdzogs chen* as taught directly by Vajrasattva (rDo rje sems dpa') who himself received them from the primordial Buddha (Skt. Adibuddha), Samantabhadra (Kun tu bzang po). dGa' rab rdo rje transmitted the entire set of teachings received to his pre-eminent disciple Mañjūśrimitra (Jam dpal bshe gnyen).
[656] Mañjuśrimitra ('Jam dpal bshes gnyen), is traditionally believed to be the principal disciple of dGa' rab rdo rje. He received by his master the whole set of teachings of the Great Perfection rDzogs pa chen po while staying at the cremation ground of bsil ba'i tshal (Śīvatana). dGa' rab rdo rje, Mañjuśrimitra, Śrīsiṃha (Shri sing ha) and Jñānasūtra (Ye shes mdo) are traditionally called by the collective name of Four Viḍyādhara (Rig 'dzin bzhi). For an account of these figures of rDzogs chen see Thondup (1984), Dudjom (1991), and Reynolds (1996).
[657] Nāgadzu = Nāgārjuna. The well-known Indian philosopher of the second century C.E. who is associated with the doctrine of emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*) central view of the Mādhyamaka School (Tib. *dbu ma*). Nāgārjuna is also at the center of the myth where he himself retrieved the Buddhist scriptures the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* (*Shes rab kyi pha*

The mind, symbolic, and oral trasmissions [of the Buddhist teachings],[659]

The scriptural transmission of the yellow scrolls,[660] the mind-mandate transmission of aspirations,[661]

And the transmission of those fortunate prophesied individuals,[662]

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*rol tu phyin pa*), which had been entrusted by the Buddha to the *nāgas*. On this myth see, among others, Dowman (1988), Gyatso (1998: 147).

[658] Hūng chen kā ra, probably Hūṃkara, also known as Hūṃ mdzad, is one of the early *siddha* at the center of the transmission of Anuyoga and one of the lineage holders of the *rdzogs chen* tradition stemming back from dGa' rab rdo rje. See Dargyay (1979: 40-41). See also Powers (1995:325), who mentions Hūṃ ka ra as one of the teachers of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes. Most probably here it refers to Hūṃ ka ra, the Nepalese master responsible for the diffusion of the transmitted precepts (*bka' ma*) within the Mahāyoga lineage and author of the *Yang dag ru lug ser phreng*, the Yangdak Rulu Golden Rosary, a treatise of the two stages of generation and completion. Dudjom (1991: 475-477).

[659] *dgongs brda snyan brgyud: rgyal ba'i dgongs pa'i brgyud pa* (the Victorious Ones' transmission of intentions), *rig 'dzin brda'i brgyud pa* (the Vidyādharas' transmission in symbols), and *gang zag snyan khung du brgyud pa* (the oral transmission of the human beings'). These three methods of transmission belong to what the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism considers the *ring brgyud bka' ma*, the long transmission of the Buddhist teaching according to an uninterrupted lineage of teachers and disciples, one of the two major systems of doctrinal transmission according to this school, the other being the *nye brgyud gter ma*, the direct or short transmission through the treasures in both material (*sa gter*) and spiritual or mental (*dgongs gter*) form. The *nye brgyud gtre ma* class traditionally includes three further methods of transmission, namely the *smon lam dbang bskur* (empowerment by aspiration), the *bka' babs lung bstan* (prophecy of the statement), and the *mkha' 'gro'i gtad rgya* (*ḍākinī*'s entrustement). As we shall see immediately below the triad of such methods of the *nye brgyud gter ma* as provided by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje in this text is articulated slightly differently from the traditional one.

A third category is also often included within the traditional rNying ma transmission methods, the *zab mo dag snang*, or the transmission of teachings through profound or pure visions. See Dargyay (1979: 12-73), Prats (1982: 38, n. 19), Tulku Thondup (1987: 37-40).

[660] *shog gser tshig brgyud*. The *shog ser* (yellow paper), or *shog dril ser po* (yellow rolled paper) are yellow paper scrolls traditionally believed to be ancient textual teachings written by Padmasambhava or even by some of his closest disciples. A few languages seem to have been employed to write the teachings, the most common one being what has come to be known as the *ḍākinīs' symbolic script* (*mkha' 'gro brda yig*). Usually the texts written on these scrolls are extremely brief and often contain only a few lines or even syllables that the treasure discoverer alone can decipher and understand. According to the tradition, after having been composed the yellow scroll teachings were concealed in material sites and locations such as boulders, rocks, rivers, tree trunks, and other locales such as pillars of monasteries with the specific purpose to be re-discovered by chosen figures to benefit future generations. Most of the *shog gser* discovered are considered to be *sa gter* (material or earth treasures). See Thondup (1981), Dargyay (1980), and Prats (1982: 83) for further discussions on this topic. Here the "transmission of the statement as yellow scrolls" should be understood as the appointment of the actual teaching to the *ḍākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro gtad rgya*) when, as a final step to complete the procedure of transmission of treasure teachings, Padmasambhava designated specific *ḍākinīs* to "encode" the teaching into symbolic letters decipherable only by the appointed treasure discoverer. They thus committed it to a written sequence on small yellow scrolls, and concealed them in material locations, in the case of earth treasures (*sa gter*), or impressed in the disciples mind, in the case of mental treasures (*dgongs gter*).

[661] *smon lam gtad rgya brgyud.* Padmasambhava after having transmitted Tantric teachings with the specific purpose of making them treasures meant to be beneficial not only to the actual receivers but also to the generations of the future, he performed a special ceremony where the aspiration initiation (*smon lam dbang bskur*) was carried out in order to expose his intention and express the wish that the teachings would be rediscovered in the future at the proper time. During this ceremony Padmasambhava designated one of his closest disciples as the treasure discoverer of that specific teaching in one of his future lives and conveyed an "appointment" or "entrustment" (*gtad rgya*) into the person's mind. In this momentous event lies the basis of the whole treasure transmission. Gyatso (1998:159).

[662] *gang zag las can lung zin brgyud pa*. The "transmission of the fortunate individuals who hold the prophecy (*lung bstan*)". This method refers to a further step in Padmasambhava transmission process ment to enforce and strengthen the appointement previously conveyed to his close disciples. Gyatso (1998:161). The communication of a prophecy

And the Ocean of Magical Illusions,[663]

Which teach according to many different circumstances,

**[f. 2a]** And the activities of the Victorious Ones of all the three times,[664]

So that this action for the welfare and happiness of living beings will be uninterrupted.

The time has arrived to present the realized Awareness-Holder mKhyen sprul bde chen gling pa's[665] teachings, which are like the sun and moon, a dance of emanations. In this regard it has been written:

**[f. 2b]** "Oh, great and skillful hero,[666]

[You bring the sentient beings to complete spiritual maturity][667]

Victorious One of one hundred million deeds,

Instruct us on enlightenment!

Nowadays, you, oh Lord,[668]

Teach us extensively on enlightenment!"

And also:

"Teach us constantly about *Nirvāṇa*,

---

foretelling the revelation (*bka' bab lung bstan*) is fundamental for the announcement of the time and circumstances related to the discovery of the teachings in the future.

[663] *sgyu 'phrul rgya mtsho*. This term refers to a broad classification of Tantric literature. This classification of Tantras belongs to a wider collection known as *sgyu 'phrul drwa ba* (the Magical Net, or Net of Magical Display), which specifically identifies the collection of Tantras mostly associated with the Mahāyoga system and contained in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (Vols. 14-16, and 19. Kapstein & Gyurme Dorje 1991, II: 248; 254). The root text of this cycle of teachings is the *rDo rje sems dpa' sgyu 'phrul drwa ba* (Gyurme and kapstein 1991: 248). For a history of these Mahāyoga Tantras see Dudjom (1991: 462-470).

[664] *dus gsum*. Present, past, and future.

[665] bDe chen gling pa incarnation of 'Jam dbyang mKhyen brtse dbang po (1820-1892), alias Kun bzang 'gro 'dul (1897-1946), the bKa' brgyud master founder of the Dza mer chen monastery in Shar mda', Nang chen. For more about Kun bzang 'gro 'dul's life and relationship to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje see Chapter Three.

[666] *dpa' bo*. "Hero" is a general epithet for the Bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'* [*bo*]), the "hero of the enlightened mind". In this verse the *byang chub sems dpa'* is praised as a "master of methods" (*thabs mkhas*), that is the way that leads to enlightenment. These verses are believed to be part of a prophetic statement produced by Kun bzang 'gro 'dul, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's root teacher. All the eight verses reproduced in the passage are addressed to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal communication.

[667] *sems can yongs su smin par mdzad*. Missing line in the original. These verses are probably taken from the *Yab sras mjal ba'i mdo* (Skt. *Pitāputrasamāgamanasūtra*), the Sūtra of the Meeting of the Father and Son. I am grateful to A lags gzan dkar rin po che (London, October 2003), for this information and addition of the missing verse from the quotation. I have not consulted the original Sanskrit.

[668] *'dren pa* (Skt. *nāyaka*), f. 2b.

Created emanations, emanations by birth, and supreme emanations.[669]

[However,] the Buddha emanation

Is the great method to complete freedom!"[670]

The supreme Awareness-Holder Kun bzang bde chen,[671] [is] himself and emanation, a beacon at these times like a lamp that shines over the mundane world![672]

Furthermore, [he is also] the power of interdependent connections between the devotion and the aspirations of his disciples.

In the *bLa ma dgongs 'dus kyi lung bstan bka' rgya ma*[673] is written:

"Vimalamitra[674], the supreme scholar,

Was not born out of actions related to the elimination of delusions

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[669] *bzo ['i sprul sku] dang skye [ba'i sprul sku] dang byang chung che [mchog gi sprul sku]*. This triad corresponds partially to the general Vajrayāna classification of "emanations" (*sprul sku*, Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*) in four categories *bzo'i sprul sku* (created emanations) represented by murals, *thang kha* paintings, and sculptures; *skye ba'i sprul sku* (birth or incarnated emanations) represented by both human and animal beings; *sna tshogs kyi sprul sku* (diversified emanations) represented by those emanations of superior beings in various material forms such as images, mountains, rocks, but also objects, jewels, and clothes; and the *mchog gi sprul sku* (supreme emanations) represented by those beings who fulfil the twelve deeds which all Buddhas, such as Buddha Śākyamuni, perform. For such a classification see for instance Norbu (1993: 89).

[670] The source of this quotation is unknown to me. According to the rNying ma tradition there are six emanations of the Buddha who are the six lords of the six realms. Within this view the *nirmāṇakāya* deities are those who help and guide the human beings along the path of liberation removing obstacles and hindrances to the ultimate attainment of *nirvāṇa.*

[671] Kun bzang 'gro 'dul. See note 28.

[672] *'jig rten gyi sgron me 'char.* As Germano has already insightfully suggested (1992:101), the term "lamp" (*sgron me*) is often found in Buddhist scriptures and is meant to refer to both the primordial gnosis (*ye shes*, Skt. *prajñā*), and the Buddhas themselves, who are the "light of the world" whose teachings and charismatic deeds constitute the radiancy that shines upon the darkness of cyclic existence.

[673] The One Hundred Teachings and Precepts according to the Guru's Gathering of Wisdom Mind. According to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal communication the *bLa ma dgongs 'dus kyi lung bstan bka' rgya ma* is a text of predictions authored by mChog gyur gling pa, also known as O rgyan mchog gyur bde chen zhig po gling pa (1829-1870). It seems that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje was in possession of a copy of this text in the past, but it was lost or destroyed during the agitated years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) like many other texts, personal belongings, and even a few *gter ma* items. I am personally not aware of such a text among Zhig po gling pa's *gter chos*. However, the text above could more probably refer to the *bLa ma dgongs pa 'dus pa las ma 'ongs lung bstan bka' rgya ma'i skor*, a collection of prophesies from the *bLa ma dgongs 'dus*, which is a text revealed by gTer chen Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396).

[674] Vimalamitra (Dri med bshes gnyen, or Dri med bshad snyan, according to Tulku Thondup), was a renowned eighth-century Indian monk and scholar who traveled to China and Tibet. Within the rNying ma school he is responsible for the diffusion of a series of *rdzogs chen* teachings associated to the *sNying thig* tradition collected in the *Bi ma snying thig*. For more information on this topic see, for instance, Thondup (1984:54). This verse referring to Vimalamitra is inserted in this biography because he one of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's former incarnations.

As his supreme emanation [Kun bzang ’gro ’dul] was perfect (*kun bzang*) without any reminder of aggregates.[675]

**[f. 3a]** And, needless to say, also [his] hundred thousands of emanations
Will act infinitely for the benefit of sentient beings”.

In the *rTsa gzhung gnad byang*[676] is written:

“At present in the form of the incarnation of Khri srong [lde’u btsan], Nam mkha’i snying po[677], and Vimalamitra,
The one named rDo rje[678] will appear in the year of the earth bird.[679]
At the proper time of his display of the treasures,
And with the aspirations [of the past] and uncorrupted actions,
He will come to benefit the teachings and the people of Tibet and Khams”.

In the *mChog gling gnas chen nyer lnga*[680] is written:

“At that time,[681] the one whose name is Padma Samantabhadra, or
Padma’i snying po rgyal po[682]

[675] According to the Buddhist view there are five aggregates (Tib. *phung po*, Skt. *skandha*), that constitute a sentient being, *gzugs kyi phung po* (the aggregate of forms), *tshor ba’i phung po* (the aggregate of sensations), *’du shes kyi phung po* (the aggregate of perceptions), *’du byed kyi phung po* (the aggregate of formations), and *rnam par shes pa’i phung po* (the aggregate of consciousness).
[676] *rTsa gzhung gnad byang* is the general name given by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje to the treasure teachings dedicated to rTa mgrin rdo rje me char. Tshe bzang bsam gling Rinpoche’s personal communication. (Taoyuan 2002).
[677] According to the tradition Grub chen nam mkha’i snying po (ninth century) was one of the twenty-five disciples of Padmasambhava’s in Tibet.
[678] *rdo rje’i ming can*. “The one named *rdo rje*” has been interpreted as referring to bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. As we have already seen in previous chapters following the tradition of the Treasure revealer’s appropriation of religious figures of the past, personalities such as emperor Khri srong lde’u btsan and Tibetan Tantric practitioners from Padmasambhava’s entourage are essential elements in the architecture of authority and legitimization in a *gter ston*’s credentials.
[679] The year 1921 according to the Gregorian calendar.
[680] *mchog gling gnas chen nyer lnga’i mdo byang*. This text is likely to be a Treasure text on pilgrimage (*gnas yig*) revealed by mChog gyur gling pa, but I have not succeeded in identifying the text personally.
[681] Here *de dus* (that time) is to be understood in its projection in the future since the verses are a prophesy and are therefore usually uttered before the event actually took place. In this specific case the arrival of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje as a treasure discoverer is compared to lightening (*thog*) falling down (*bab*) from the phenomenal reality (*chos nyid*) of the sky (*nam mkha’*).
[682] Both “Padma Samantabhadra” and “Padma’i snying po rgyal po” are names referring to bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. As a reincarnation of one of the close disciples of Padmasambhava, he is considered the “Universally Perfect

Will appear just like lightening falling from the sky,

Manifesting the accomplishments of Padma[sambhava].

Padmasambhava myself in actuality and vision,

**[f. 3b]** with the lord Khri srong lde btsan,

Will be summoned up into one and will perform the display of illusions.

Whatever situation is encountered, it will be beneficial to the supreme omniscient bDe chen gling,[683]

And the perfect teachings will thus be propagated".[684]

In the s*Ku gsum rang grol*[685] is written:

"A highly defiled age[686] is closing by,

And sometime within twenty years or longer,[687]

A disciple of bDe chen gling ,[688] reincarnation of

The Dharmarāj,[689] Nam mkha'i snying po, and Vimalamitra,

Lord of fortunate future, will [thus] arrive.[690]

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One" (kun tu bzang po, Skt. Samantabhadra) with Padma(sambhava), and the "king" (*rgyal po*) and "heart" (*snying po*) of Padma(sambhava), that is his spiritual son or disciple.

[683] bDe chen gling is one of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's *gter ston* names after Kun bzang 'gro 'dul, who was also known as Kun bzang bde chen gling.

[684] The teachings of the *rDzogs chen* system are called here "perfect" (*kun bzang*) also meaning that the teachings were uttered and spread in their pure from by Kun tu bzang po (Samantabhadra), the one who as Primordial Buddha (Adibuddha) is believed to have first first bestowed the rDzogs chen teachings to his own *saṃbhogakāya* form, Vajrasattva (rDo rje sems dpa').

[685] *sKu gsum rang grol* (Self-liberation through the Three Bodies), refers to one of the the treasures revealed by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, the *sKu gsum sgrub skor gu ru drag mo phreng can gyi mdun skyed dang sbrel ba'i bzlog pa gnam lcags 'khor lo khro chu thog 'bebs*. I could not find the exact quotation as cited in this passage from the *sKu gsum rang grol*. However a similar statement referring to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje'a appearance as treasure discoverer can be found in the "appendix" (*zur rgyan*) to the text mentioned above, that is the *sKu gsum rang grol sgrub skor gu ru drag mobreng can gyi zur rgyan rdo rje'i bzhad sgra ye shes klong 'khyil*.

[686] "Defiled" (*snyigs*) refers to the age of corruption and degeneration (*snyigs dus*), characterized by a degeneration in life span (*tshe*), the general karma (*las*), the view (*lta ba*), and the faculties of beings (*sems can*), as well as an increase of the obscuring emotions (*nyon mongs*). This era is usually associated with a period of particularly intense persecution or eclipse of the Buddhist teachings diffusion and practice. The 9th century decline of royal patronage for Buddhist monasteries that emperor gLang dar ma enforced is one example of the "dark ages" that are due to appear at times when circumstances for a proper dissemination of Buddhism are not favorable. For a detailed study of the discourse of decline and eclipse in Buddist literature see Nattier (1991).

[687] The "splitting apart" here probably refers to the beginning of political conflicts in Tibet due to Chinese external menace.

[688] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje disciple of Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje.

[689] The Buddhist emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan.

A man of the magic yoga,

His name is rDo rje, and he will appear in the earth bird year.[691]

Since his youth he will generate renunciation[692] of cyclic existence,

[And] the present karmic connections he shall indeed not forget.

Without any training he will activate the awareness,

Without any teaching he will clarify all points of knowledge.

Having particularly developed both realization and analytical insight,

He will lead to rNga yab[693] those who have visual and auditory connections [with him],

**[f. 4a]** And he will establish [himself] at the ultimate unsurpassed level."

It is [also] written:

"The unfailing and indestructible oral transmission is praised,[694]

Beyond the realm of the Victorious Ones,

This is the omniscent primordial wisdom that

Completely liberates [everything] from the sphere of obstructions."

Praising our Teacher, Lord of Acomplishment, Samantabhadra's words[695], he [Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje] raised on [my] head the crown of authority.[696] As if [the content was] poured from a full vase, he also empowered me in a great quantity of the refined essence of the profoundly secret vajrayāna,[697] general esoteric [*rdzogs chen*] instructions (*spyi ti*), and several destructive

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[690] *rtor ba = rtol ba*.

[691] Here *'dab chags lo* means the "year of the bird" and it clearly refers to the *sa bya lo*, the "earth-bird year", year of birth of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. The "earth-bird year" corresponds to the year 1921.

[692] *nges 'byung* (Skt. *niḥsaraṇa*). Renunciation, or repentance caused by a feeeling of disgust at worldly matters.

[693] *rNga yab ling* or *Sang mdog dpal ri* are names of celestial residences of Padmasambhava.

[694] *rdo rje'i lung*

[695] *dBang phyug sa manta bha dra*. Kun tu bzang po, the Primordial Buddha the original source of the *rDzogs chen* teachings and the incarnation of the pure enlightened state. Germano (1992:170-174).

[696] *bka' yi cod paṇ spyi bor bskur* A figurative and poetic expression meaning the reception of (treasure) teachings and the authorization to teach the teachings received by a teacher. The tiara (*cod paṇ*) representing the teaching transmission and authorization (*bka'*) is bestowed (*bskur*) on the top of someone's head (*spyi bo*). Here it refers to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's reception of teachings, empowerments, and instructions of treasure cycles he himself retrieved from Padmasambhava.

[697] "The pure essence of the profoundly secret Vajrayāna" (*zab gsang rdo rje theg pa'i yang zhun*), and "Positive actions of the *spyi ti* yoga, instructions on the extremely secret seal" (*yang sang gab rgya man ngag spyi ti'i las mtha'*) are also rDzogs chen teachings revealed by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje.

rituals (*las mtha'*), among the most profoundly secret;[698] and sections of the *bKa' zab yid bzhin nor bu*[699] composed after the instructions of the precepts on the unsurpassable commitments related to the thirteen high rebirths,[700] [in order for the teachings] to reside gloriously in the beings and the teachings of the future.

**[f. 4b]** Under the power of the special occasions determined by [previous] aspirations,
[there are] people who have requested a narration of [my] life story.
This is a concise narration of this very life [of mine] replacing a much longer narration of previous and later rebirths of the eighty years old Prabhāsvara [written] for those many intelligent disciples [701] and especially for the purpose [of satisfying] the earnest request of the foreign scholar Antonio[702].

In the eastern part of Tibet, the Land of Snows, in the area called 'Bri zla sgang,
Great glory of the mDo khams region,
[there is a place called] rDo ti gangs dkar, [one of] the six main places.
On its right side [is] the lake g.Yu mtsho sngon mo,
Just in front of the great sacred site mount Rag rdzong ri bo dpal
**[f. 5a]** There is a land where crowds of *ḍākinīs* meet,
Known as 'Dzam mo dkar mo,[703] a garden of lotus flowers,
At its right side rises mount Ha ri dge bsnyen, glowing like a gem.
Behind it [rises] the high mountain g.Yu rtse ri bo.
On the left side there is the dPa' bo'i zlo gar 'khrab.
Cheerfulness arises at its sight for its charming beauty,
As if it is permanently at a center of a gleaming pavillion,

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[698] *sPyi ti*, one of the three subdivisions of the Esoteric Instructional Classes of Atiyoga (*atiyoga man ngag snying thig*) as revealed by the *gter ston* O rgyan gling pa (1323-?). These are *A ti*, the innermost spirituality, *sPyi ti*, the general revelation of the profound tantras, and *Yang ti*, which reveals the most secret lineage of teachings. Gyurme and Kapstein (1991: 73, n.1029).

[699] Name of the treasure cycle (*gter skor*) revealed by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje.

[700] *sKye ba bcu gsum bar du 'brel ba'i dam tshig las mi 'da' bar lung*. The thirteen reincarnations/manifestations of King Khri srong lde'u btsan.

[701] *blo gsal mig ldan 'khor slob du ma*. Lit. for those many disciples who have the eye of wisdom.

[702] My name is mentioned here for having been the one who has eventually asked for a written record of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life account.

[703] 'Dzam mo dkar mo is the birth place of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. It is a vast pasture land more than 50 km south-west of sKye rgu mdo town (Ch. Yushu). The area is inhabitated by nomadic and semi-nomadic groups of herdsmen and a few peasant families.

And pleasant tunes and sounds of instruments such as drums and trumpets
Resound melodiously every day.

Rol pa['i] rdo rje,[704] incarnation of Hūm mDzad[705] said that:

"Pad[ma] 'byung[gnas] has promised that
[For] whoever reaches this sacred place,[706] the great power of receiving prophecies will be perfected,
And in the future he will have a vision of being in front of Gu ru [Rin po che].

The enlightened mind of those with good karmic propensities due to past aspirations
Will develop and their defilements will be permanently purified,
Achieving the power to become disciples of the Knowledge-Holder Victorious One."[707]

**[f. 5b]** When the time was ripe, I was born in the iron-bird year of the Fifteenth year[708]
In this very holy place, as a result of [my] past aspirations.
On a fifteenth day of summer, at Vaiśākha.[709]
Hundreds of people had visions of
Wonderful appearances and good signs,
And all expressed many words of praise [for me].
I received many laudatory words by many holy beings,
[This was a] lucky omen and fortune for the country for a long time!

Then before I was seven years old I roamed along mountain ridges.[710]

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[704] The fouth Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340-1383), received formal transmission of both bKa' brgyud and rNying ma lineages. Among his teachers were Sang rgyas gling pa and especially g.Yung ston rdo rje dpal ba (1284-1365). The latter was a major disciple of the third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339).
[705] Ācarya Hūṃ mdzad, also known as Hūṃ ka ra, was a well-known Indian *mahāsiddha* teacher of the past. See note above for more details. See also Dargyay (1979: 40-42) and Thondup (1984: 23). However, here the name may refer to a deity, the wrathful Hūṃ ka ra, or *Khro bo hūm mdzad*. Cf. Gyurme and Kapstein (1991: 408).
[706] *gnas*. I have opted to translate *gnas* as "sacred place" following a widely attested habit in recent studies of pilgrimage and sacred lanscape in Tibet culture. See for instance Huber (1990).
[707] Source unidentified.
[708] This date corresponds to 1921.
[709] Tib. *Sa ga zla ba* (Skt. *vaiśākha*) is the day when most Asian Buddhist societies celebrate the Buddha Purmina a cumulative event dedicated to the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing into Parinirvāṇa.

Thoughts, dreams, and visions appeared in great number,[711]

And, as a consequence of my former lives, I met [in visions]

Guru [Rinpoche], the Dharma King and his son[712] as well as the emperor and his assistants.[713]

Until the age of twelve **[f. 6a]** I embraced the deliberately crazy behavior,[714]

And I indulged in conversations with deities and demons of the external world.

I did not interact with human beings,

And I appreciated [instead] solitary places, cemeteries, forests, and lake banks.[715]

In my homeland, when I was thirteen I became object of mean people's hostility.[716]

Those circumstances changed [my] Karma, and due to the power of my previous aspirations,

I met the great teacher bLa ma bKra shis chos 'phel.[717]

[From him] I received the entire instructions of the *Nā ro mkha' spyod*.[718]

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[710] As for the choice of sacred or powerful places such as mountains (*ri*) for residence and place of practice see my brief discussion in footnote below.

[711] This period of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life is marked by a series of continuous oniric and visionary activity which is interpreted by his teachers and by he himself as the beginning of his career as a spiritually endowed religious personality. Dreams (*rmi lam*) and visions or apparitions (*snang ba*) are considered highly valuable signs in Tibetan culture and deserve a respected position and role in the determination of one's own past life, foreknowledge, and prophetic views.

[712] Emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan and his son Mu tri btsan po

[713] *rje 'bangs grogs lnga*. Khri srong lde'u btsan, Bodhisattva/Śantarakśita, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, rGyal ba mchog dbyangs, Vairocana.

[714] *smyos pa'i brtul zhugs spyad*. Yogis are traditionally seen as religious figures characterized by deliberate bahavior (*brtul zhugs*) often bordering madness (*smyos*).

[715] Isolated sites (*dben sa*), cemeteries or charnel grounds (*dur khrod*), mountains (*ri bo*), forests (*nag tshal*) and lake islands (*mtsho gling*) are among the most powerful places where hermits and Tantric practitioners reside in order to carry out rituals and meditation retreats. As we shall see again below, the sacred place scenario is widely employed by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje in his autobiographical narrative to convey the reader the sense of sanctity and spiritual attainment necessary to legitimize the author's life path and corroborate his self-representation as a religious figure. This matrix of asceticism and isolation in remote places and cemeteries as abodes to Tantric practitioners and realized beings are already attested in early biographical narratives of religious personalities. The presence of these powerful places can be read back into the life of Padmasambhava who is believed to have stayed and practiced in charnel grounds where he received teachings from various *ḍākinīs* (Dudjom 1991: 469). Stories and narratives about Padmasambhava's meditation retreats in caves and hermitages around Tibet to which Tibetans are usually exposed have contributed to a particular understanding of the natural world so powerfully represented in Tibetan culture.

[716] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje had a difficult life as a young boy. Because of the loss of his mother and the bad reputation of his father as a cruel robber and mercyless bandit, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's life was heavily burdened by social emargination and poverty.

[717] mKhan chen bKra shis chos 'phel, a renown teacher of the bKa' brgyud school of Tibetan Buddhism whose eclectic tendencies made him well-known in the rDza chu kha region of Khams where he established his own monastery. I have not data about bKra shis chos 'phel and his monastery.

[718] *Nā ro mkha' spyod ma*, the Vajrayoginī *sādhana* according to the Indian mystic Nāropa (1016-1100). rDo rje phag mo/rDo rje rnal 'byor ma (Vajravārāhī/Vajrayoginī) is a deity of major significance in the Tantric Buddhism practiced by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. The rNying ma school already has a well-established connection with the cult of Vajrayoginī, which stems back from Padmasambhava himself who is said to have received teachings from her while he was practicing at the Paruṣakavana charnel ground (Dudjom 1991: 469). However, in Tibet a stronger

He [also] praised me for the auspicious signs of [my] meditative experiences and dream cultivation.

In order to remove obscuration, I prostrated all the way to go see the Jo bo,[719]

and by never being attracted to illusive wealth and preventing adversities,

I concluded the entire pilgrimage and prostrations to the sacred places of Lhasa and cental Tibet.[720]

In particular, when I met Phug cog byams dgon,[721]

He praised me for being a good Khampa lad, and [from him]

**[f. 6b]** I received empowerments, instructions, and the vows of the *dga' ldan lha brgya*.[722]

Having then conquered the mind and the apparent phenomena, I soared in the sky.[723]

At that time everybody admired [me] and spoke words of praise.

Having perfected the unification of the Three Secrets of the Lama,[724]

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emphasis on the *sādhan* practice can be seen in the *bka' brgyud* school of Buddhism, which is specifically represented by the Nāropa's tradition of the *ḍākinī* (*nā ro mkha' spyod*). Extensive discussions of the Vajrayoginī's cult both in India and Tibet may be found in Simmer-Brown (2001) and English (2002).

[719] *jo bo mjal phyag mtshal*. Jo bo, is the popular Tibetan term, mening "Lord", "Master", but also "elder brother", by which is known a particular Śākyamuni Buddha statue housed in the Jo khang temple or gTsug lag khang in Lhasa. Tradition has it that this statue was brought directly from China by the Tang princess Wen Cheng in the seventh century as part of her dowry to the marriage with the Dharma-King Srong btsan sgam po. The Jo khang, or Tsug lag khang, and the Jo bo statue, are the considered highly sacred places by Tibetans and therefore ambitious destinations of pilgrimages.

The practice of pilgrimage (*gnas skor*) is one of the most common and widely spread activities of Buddhist popular religious practice. Tibetans, even nowadays, perform this ritual very intensely. Both Buddhists and Bon adherents consider pilgrimage to, and circumambulation of, religion sites and monasteries as a major means of accumulating merits and personal spiritual achievement. Lhasa as center of both political and religious power and abode of the Dalai Lama has covered a relevant position as a major destination of pilgrimage and popular religious rituals of circumambulation and prayer since the presence of the fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682).

[720] *lha ldan dbus*. dBus region of central Tibet and Lhasa, the capital. In Central Tibet Lhasa has been historically seen as the center not only of the political governement of Tibet but also as the site of the spiritual and secular leader of Tibetans people, the Dalai Lama. gZhis ka rtse, the second greatest urban centre of Tibet, was the residence of the second higher spiritual leader of the country, the Panchen Lama. Therefore Central Tibet has also benefited from this general religious atmosphere enjoying the birth, growth, and development of Tibetan major urban centers such as Lhasa, gZhis ka rtse, rGyal rtse, and other minor towns, all connected with important monastic institutions and religious figures.

[721] dGe bshes Phug cog byams mngon, also know as Phur bu cog byams pa, a *dge lugs bla ma* from Lhasa was probably a respected and renown teacher from 'Bras spungs monastery in Lhasa. He was respected for his high education and apparently known also for his personal interest in the practice of *rdzogs chen*. sPrul sku Tshe bzang bSam gling's personal communication (Taipei 2002). I have not been able to gather any further information so far on this religious figure.

[722] *dga' ldan lha brgya*. "A Hundred Deities of Tushita" is a *guruyoga* (*bla ma'i rnal 'byor*) of Tsong kha pa (Tsong kha pa bLo bzang rgya mtsho, 1357-1419), founder of the dGe lugs pa School of Tibetan Buddhism. This *guruyoga* seems to have been composed by the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682).

[723] *mkha' la gdengs*. The actual power of flying is usually seen as a skill achieved by intense physical and meditative exertion. Far from being considered a goal in its own right, on the contrary flying as well as other supernatural powers is usually considered a sign accompanying one's progress on the path of personal spiritual achievements.

The supreme accomplishments of contemplative experience and realization increased rapidly,

And I cut the attachment to the eight worldly concerns.[725]

Then I went on pilgrimage to sacred places

In Mon, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Eastern India.[726]

Since at that time I befriended both human and non-human beings,[727]

I was not scared by anything and I was happy by myself.

I went to meet the great saint Gro mo dGe bshes.[728]

When I paid my respects to him[729] he gave me his precious pills[730] and

Bestowed extraordinary teachings on mind training upon me.[731]

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[724] *bla ma'i gsang gsum*, the bLa ma's Three Secrets, also known as the Three Imperishable Indestructible Realities (*rdo rje mi shigs pa gsum*), refer to the indestructible reality of *sku* (body), *gsung* (speech), and *thugs* (mind). According to Kapstein and Gyurme Dorje (1991: 114-115) these are also called the Three Essential Points Leading to the Exapanse (*'khrid pa dbyings kyi gnad gsum*), which are one category of the Eight (Great) Conveyances or Lineages of Attainment (*sgrub brgyud shin rta chen po brgyad*): the rNying ma school or Ancient Translation Tradition (*snga 'gyur rnying ma ba*); the bKa' gdams school; the instructions of the path and fruit (*gdams ngag lam 'bras*); the four great and eight minor schools of the bKa' brgyud pa (*bka' bryud che bzhi chung brgyad*); the Shangs pa bKa' brgyud pa; the Kālacakra (*dus kyi 'khor lo*); the True Doctrine of the Pacification of Suffering and its branch, the Object of Cutting (*dam chos sdug bsngal zhi byed yan lag gcod yul*); and the above mentioned Service and Attainment of the Three Indestructible Realities (*rdo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub*). For further reference see Dudjom (1991: 852-853). In the system of O rgyan pa (reported in Kapstein & Gyurme Dorje, 1991: 114-115) the *rdo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub* are: the training of the body-indistructible reality (*sku rdo rje*), which develops composure (or withdrawal) (*sor bsud*), the training of the speech-indistructible reality (*gsungs rdo rje*), which develops breath control (or life up-holding) (*srog 'dzin*), and the training of the mind-indistructible reality (*thugs rdo rje*), which develops recollection/mindfulness and contemplation (*dran ting*).

[725] The eight worldly objects of attachment, *'jig rten chos brgyad*: *rnyed pa*, gain; *ma rnyed pa*, loss; *snyan pa*, fame; *mi snyan pa*, infamy; *smad pa*, slander; *bstod pa*, praise; *bde ba*, happiness; *sdug bsngal*, misery.

[726] Pilgrimages and religious visits to lands and countries outside Tibet were common practices in Tibet. India was a destination for most Tibetan religious pilgrims in the quest for a personal contact with the places where Buddhism originated. For sacred journeys and bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's own pilgrimage to India see my discussion above.

[727] *mi dang mi ma yin kun gyis mthun sbyor.* bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje probably refers here to people who met and helped him in all places he stopped. As for non-humans (*mi ma yin*), he means the Tantric deities that accompany intense visualization practices (*sādhanā*) that he probably carried out in various places along his path while on pilgrimage to India.

[728] Gro mo dGe bshes rin po che, also known as dGe bshes sNgags dbang skal bzang (b. 1936) dGe lugs Teacher of Yid dga' chos gling monastery in Sikkim. He obtained his title of *dGe bshes* at Se ra monastery, Lhasa in 1959. Lama Anagarika Govinda is the only Westerner who has written some accounts about Gro mo dge bshes in his book *The Way of the White Clouds*.

[729] *zhabs tu btud*. Lit. "I bowed to his feet."

[730] Apparently Gro mo dGe bshes rin po che was well-known for his *ril bu* pills whose miraculous powers were famous in Tibet. For more accounts on Gro mo dGe bshes and his *ril bu* pills see Govinda's *The Way of the White Clouds.*

[731] *blo sbyongs*, the (Mahāyāna) Mind Training is a literary genre similar to the Stages of the Path (*lam rim*) literature as composed by the *dge lugs pa* founder Tsong kha pa bLo bzang grags pa (1357-1419), although more succint, practice oriented and focused on the generation of altruistic compassion. The *blo sbyongs* teachings, like those on the Stages of the Path, are usually part of the ambitious curriculum of *dge lugs pa* monks preparing for the *dge bshes* degree (*dge ba'i bshes gnyen*. Skt. *kalyāṇamitra*. "Spiritual friend"). The latter is a common way of explaining what it means to be a *bla ma* (Skt. *guru*), or teacher.

He said to me that in the future I would benefit living beings, and he also offered me some textual transmissions.

**[f. 7a]** After that I arrived at the seat of Sa skya[732] in the center of gTsang.
I became more and more acquainted with the guardians of the teachings rising around me,[733]
And while some simply appeared, others performed magic miracles.
However, [no matter what they did,] I realized that all external phenomena are illusions.
Khri chen skyabs mgon of the Phun tshogs pho brang[734]
Gave me unequalled and unique teachings,
And generously offered me gifts including goods and religious instructions.
I also received guidance concerning how I will benefit the beings in the future.

After that I went on pilgrimage and completed my visit of all the sacred places of gTsang,[735]
I circumambulated around many extraordinary sacred places.
Without any effort I spontaneously developed a sense for renunciation and weariness,[736]
Thus purifying myself from the evil attachments to ego-fixating appearances.

Later on I reached the glorious mTshur phu monastery,[737]

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[732] Sa skya monastery is the first establishment of the Sa skya school in Tibet. It was founded in 1073 by 'Khon dKon mchog rgyal po (1034-1102) from the local influential 'Khon family. Sa skya monastery is located in the gTsang region of central Tibet.

[733] *bka' srung rnams kyis bslangs*(*/lhong*) *tshad che cher bsten*. Here bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje refers to intense visionary experiences that he underwent while at Sa skya monastery.

[734] Ngag dbang mthu stobs dbang phyug drag shul yon tan rgya mtsho dpal bzang po (1900-1950) of the Sa skya bdag khri Phun tshogs pho brang, one of the two palaces of the Sa skya monastery, the other being the sgron ma pho brang. Ngag dbang mthu stobs dbang phyug was at the head of the monastery as abbot from 1937 until his death in 1950. I express my gratitude to Tashi Tshering of the Amnye Machen Institute and prof. Leonard van der Kuijp for this information.

[735] According to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal account, beside Sa skya monastery he also visited other important Buddhist centers of Tsang such as Zhwa lu sger khang monastery (11th century) which lies some 20 km south-east of gZhis ka rtse, bKra shis lhun po monastery (founded in 1447 by dGe 'dun grub, a disciple of Tsong kha pa), in gZhis ka rtse, and the great *stūpa* of rGyal rtse, the *bKra shis sgo mang mchod rten* or *sKu 'bum* (founded around 1440).

[736] *nges 'byung skyo shas rtsol med lhun gyis grub*. The process of merit accumulation and personal achievements is clear in this passage. Pilgrimage and circumambulation of sacred places and powerful spaces in Tibet is usually associated with a deep sense of personal spiritual growth. Renunciation (*nges 'byung*) and weariness (*skyo shas*) are both symptoms of one's own commitment to follow the path of Buddhist practice in the way of the Bodhisattva.

[737] *dpal gyi mtshur phu gdan sa*. mTshur phu monastery is a Tibetan Buddhist monastery that served as the traditional seat of the rGyal ba karma pa of the *bka' brgyu* school. Founded in the early 1180s by Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110-1193), the first to be recognized in the lineage of the Karma pa, it is located in the village of rGu rum in the sTod lung bde chen county, aprroximately 70 km north-west of Lhasa.

**[f. 7b]** Where I met Rig pa'i rdo rje, Lord of the Victorious Ones.[738]
He transferred the transmission of intentions to me and our minds mingled inseparably.
I generated a strong dynamic energy of awareness[739] out of contemplative experience and realization.

As unobstructed foreknowledge manifested, I received some prophecies.
For the sake of future benefit, he conferred [upon me] a solemn proclamation,[740]
Announcing that I was to be particularly beneficial to the Buddhist Teachings and living beings.
He [thus] empowered [me] with the teachings on *sādhanas* and tantras for the regions of Khams.

Exemplary individuals and holy masters,
Of the great lands of Nepal, Tibet, and Khams,
Praised me and proclaimed me messenger of Padmasambhava.[741]
[Henceforth] I retrieved various treasures [in the form of] spiritual and precious artifacts.[742]

People would certainly achieve happiness
Benefiting from encountering me, from being ordinary and less fortunate.[743]
[Because of this] those virtuous people will purify their obscurations in the future,
**[f. 8a]** As I dispelled the decay of the degenerate age from this intermediate era.

Then in accordance with the power of the aspirations of the past,
mKhyen sprul bDe chen gling pa,[744]
Who is the great accomplished one, inseparable from the great teacher [Padmasambhava],[745]

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[738] Rang 'byung (khyab bdag) rig pa'i rdo rje, the sixteenth Karmapa (1924-1981). Born in 'Dan khog in Khams, Rang 'byung was enthroned when still eight years old in his own village and reached mTshur phu monastery the same year and stayed there until 1959 when he decide to escape into exile to India.
[739] *rig pa'i rtsal shugs*, f. 7b
[740] *'ja' tham chen mo. 'ja' tham*, refers to a sort of edict or proclamation (*'ja' sa*) often the same as credentials (*tham ga*) offered to outstanding practitioners. It seems that in Tibet the *'ja' tham* credentials were specifically bestowed by the Karma bKa' brgyud leaders. A lags gzan dkar rin po che's personal communication (London 2003).
[741] The word *pho nya*, "messenger" or "assistant," refers to the disciples of Padmasambhava, i.e. *gter stons*, Treasure revealers. These are believed to be the first close disciples of Padmasambhava who received his teachings and were appointed as receptacles to preserve these teachings and act as messengers of his teachings for future generations.
[742] *gter kha sna tshogs drangs.* It is at this time that bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje begins to discover his first series of material earth treasure (*sa gter*) that will significantly spur his role in the tradition of Treasure revelation.
[743] According to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje there were people around him benefitted from his auspicious connections with Padmasambhava.
[744] An epithet of Kun bzang 'gro 'dul.

Told me:

"Following the entrustment of the transmission of Guru's prophetical statements,[746]

The exeptional aspirations of Drag sngags gling pa,[747]

And also the textual transmission of the *bka' ma* and *gter ma* teachings of the great five

Awareness-Holders' descendents of the Buddhist emperor[748]

And of the followers of the three holy masters,[749]

You will spread excellent esoteric teachings, [750]

Especially on the utterly secret *Seminal Heart*, [751]

As a means of pacifying the evil era,

Which is obscuring this defiled age and the general teachings.

**[f. 8b]** As I became conscious of my unity with Padmasambhava,[752]

I also received spiritual commands.[753]

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[745] Here, *mahāguru* refers to guru Padmasambhava.

[746] *gu ru'i lung bstan bka' bab brgyud pa gtad*. The prohetic statements of Padmasambhava according to which once concealed in its treasury house (*gter gnas*), the Treasure will be protected by an appointed Treasure guardian (*gter srung*), and then properly re-discovered at the right time by one of the appropriateTreasure revealer (*gter ston*).

[747] *drag sngags gling*. Translation uncertain.

[748]The five Awareness-Holders and Treasure revealers (*gter ston rgyal po lnga*) among the emanations of emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan are Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer, Gu ru chos dbang, rDo rje gling pa, O rgyan padma gling pa, and 'Jam dbyang mkhyen brtse dbang po. Gyurme and Kapstein (1991: 145).

[749] According to bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, here "the three holy beings" refer to Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje; mTshad nyid bsod bstan, *gter ston* who lived under the reign of king bDe ba bzhung, revealed the *Khro bcu thugs gdang* treasure cycle, and whose monastery, the mTshad nyid dgon, is located in bKa' ma village of Cin thang area in Chab mdo county (Khams/TAR, PRC); and mKhan po 'Jigs med dbang chen (d. 1991), one of the late abbots of the Zur mang monastery in sKye rgu mdo (Yushu) county (Khams/Qinghai, PRC). bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's personal communication, gNas chen padma mountain hermitage, 2000.

[750] *bka' rgya*. The "word-seal" refers to esoteric teachings.

[751] *yang gsang snying thig*. The esoteric teachings of the *snying thig* together with the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) teachings are at the heart of the contemplation practices of the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. The tradition of the *snying thig* diffusion in Tibet provides two lineages. One is that originated by Padmasambhava who first secretly taught them to his consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and then also to princess Lha lcam Padma gsal at *mChims spu* as the *man ngag mkha' 'gro'i snying thig*. These teachings were discovered as the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* by the 13th century *gter ston*, and princess reincarnation, Padma las 'brel rtsal (Dudjom 1991, II: 554-555). According to another tradition, the *sNying thig* teachings are associated with the Indian rdzogs chen master Vimalamitra, who introduced them in Tibet in the 8th century C.E. These *snying thig* materials were hidden as Treasures by Vimalamitra's close disciple Nyang ban ting 'dzin bzang po and later on discovered by the 11th century *gter ston*, and himself emanation of Vimalamitra, gNas brtan ldang ma lhun rgyal. He then proceeded to their transmission in Tibet (Dudjom 1991, I: 555-557; Germano 1994; Gyatso 1998: 153-154). The great master 'Jigs med gling pa (1730-1798) also discovered his own set of *sNying thig* teachings of the rdzogs chen system which he himself labeled *kLong chen snying thig* (Gyatso 1998).

[752] *o rygan dbyer med pas nges shes thob*. Lit. "I attained knowledge of my inseparability from O rgyan (i.e. Padmasambhava)."

Although I was worthy of striving for the accomplishment of something meaningful,
[Despite] my sincere attitude considering the shared public situation,[754]
Human beings who could be trusted as qualified disciples to whom I could truly transmit the teachings were very few.
Therefore, I could not realize my purpose and I had to postpone [my activities] for a while.

At the proper time, I performed every action and [teachings] were propagated.
In particular, the great *gter* [*ston*] [Nyag bla] Byang chub rdo rje,[755]
Emanation of prince Mu rub btsan po,
Bestowed upon me the empowerment of the dynamic energy of awareness.[756]
Many hundreds of lineage holders who received the symbolic transmission,
And the immense benefit to the living beings manifested as clearly as the sun and the moon.
Given that all this originated from the transmissions of Padmasambhava,
Encouraged by my previous [deeds], **[f. 9a]** he (Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje) invested me with great authority.
This was the praising prophecy regarding the Teachings.[757]

Afterwards, I sought many Treasure items from Treasure places,
Including major Treasures and minor Treasures.[758]
Conditioned by time and by the force of shared circumstances,[759]

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[753] *bdag la bka' yang dbab*. Lit. "Spiritual commands also fell upon me ( i.e. Treasure teachings)."
[754] *spyi mthun las la*. Lit "while sharing common destiny/fate/karma." This refers to the changed situation in Tibet under Chinse control and more specifically the Cultural Revolution. Bde chen 'od gsal rdo rje and bKra shis rgyal mtshan. Ri phug kha Hermitage, July 1999.
[755] Nyag bla rig 'dzin yang chub rdo rje, also known as Krag 'thung bdud 'dul hūm nag gling pa was a renown *gter ston* and master of the Great Perfection who exerted great influence on bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje, was not the only one recognized as the reincarnation (*yang srid*) of emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan's son, Mu rub btsan po. According to O rgyan thob rgyal rin po che's biography of mChog 'gyur gling pa, the renowned *gter ston* from Nang chen, he was also a reincarnation of Mu rub btsan po. See O rgyan thob rgyal *(*1988: 7).
[756] *rig pa'i rtsal*. The dynamic energy of awareness One of the locutions within the rdzogs chen system associated with one's own potentiality of inner awareness. This term refers to the specifically rdzogs chen ability to see things as they really are, a projection of the mind.
[757] It refers to a prophecy uttered by Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje concerning bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's future as a *gter ston*.
[758] *gter chen dang gter phran*. Treasures are apparently also classified by the consistency of their appearance. Thus material earth treasures can be major Treasures (*gter chen*) such as statues, religious paraphernalia, and written scrolls. Or they can be minor Treasures (*gter phran*) such as precious and semi-precious stones, minor objects, and conch shells.

The fruition of the glorious Teachings and living beings was extremely scarce.[760]
Under such circumstances, due to the complexity of the time and the effects of karma,
[The land of] Tibet, the Buddhist teachings, and the living beings, were influenced by previous general and specific karmic actions, and
Became overwhelmed by the rising darkness and decline.

At the time when everybody's true fruits ripened,
By Padmasambhava's special blessing,[761]
The guardian deities protected me like a mother to her child,
And by performing many good deeds,
I overcame all the evil attacks [coming] from others.

**[f. 9b]** Having recovered from the bad degeneration of [this] transitional period,[762]
Moon rays were shone [again] on the glory of all beings.
In order to act for the benefit of living beings, I settled down in solitary places,[763]
[Where] I practiced the profound teachings and trained in the true meaning.[764]

Thanks to my [past] aspirations, the proper time arrived to improve my dynamic energy of awareness,
And thanks to the particularly marvellous kindness of a Buddha,
While earnestly aspiring to the production of the extremely secret cycle of *sādhanas*,[765]

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[759] *dus dbang gyur dang spyi mthun las bsags mthu'i*. Lit. "the force of the common destiny/karma." As explained by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, this locution refers to the general difficulties brought about by the new political circumstances in Tibet.
[760] This metaphor refers to the difficulties encountered by the practice of Buddhism in Tibet during the years when the Chinese Red Guards arrived and the devastating effects of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1977). Information by Tshe bzang bSam gling rin po che. Taipei, Nov. 2002.
[761] *padma'i byin rlabs*. bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje regards material Treasures as blessings (*byin rlabs*), which spring directly from Padmasambhava compassion. Their retrieval is of particular importance as they represent the presence of Padmasambhava himself and the rejuvenation of the tradition.
[762] *dus kyi 'pho 'gyur rgud pa bcung sos pas*. In the years immediately following the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the PRC embraced a general shift in the political domain which was also to reflect a change of attitude towards issues concerning religious and ethnic policy. Those years (from 1978 onward) saw a general relaxation on specific issues of religious expression and practice in Tibet.
[763] This happened in the early 1980s when bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje began to establish various mountain retreat centers in the larger Zur mang area near Nang chen.
[764] *bka' zab nyams blangs yang dag don la sbyor*. The practice of *rdzogs chen* meditation.
[765] *Yang gsang sgrub skor* (the utterly secret cycles of *sādhana*) is a formula which appears in many titles of the treasure cycles revealed by bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Among those *sādhana* cycles revealed by bDe chen 'od gsal

I received the Treasure seal of the *ḍākinī* in agreement with the prophesised transmission.[766]

The mental seal opened to the supreme Tantras of the Ati,[767]

The deeply secret and highly enjoyable Great Perfection,.

And many fortunate lineage holders with [good] karma and aspirations,

Achieved liberation and perfect renunciation.[768]

The perilous path of internal and external shortcomings that caused hindrance,

**[f. 10a]** And the malignant attacks of powerful wrathful mantras were defeated.

However, since the defiled age was spontaneously manifesting as a glow,

the glorious wave of the ordinary Teachings,

and the ocean of activities of those sublime beings who uphold the teachings, conquered

The power of perverted views [appearing] among those intellectuals of unfortunate doctrines,

The hostile breeze [blowing against] the bright lamp of truth,

[Caused] an overflowing wave of misery all over the country of Tibet.

Similarly, as this intermediate time unfolded,

I received a great number of teachings

That realize the single essence of the teacher,

Such as the *Kun bzang thugs tig yang gsang snying po*,

A very essential and excellent profound teaching,

The *bLa ma dpal chen 'jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed*,

The *Yi dam kun 'dus yang gsang rta mgrin*,

The *Ma rgyud mkha' 'gro'i chos sde* **[f. 10b]** *gsang chen lam*,

The *Phrin las zab mo dregs 'joms rdo rje phur*,

*The Drag sngags yongs 'dus drang srong med pa'i rgyud.*

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rdo rje most of them are dedicated to Buddha Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, and Guru Rinpoche as they appear in the first volume of his collected works; and to Hayagrīva/rTa mgrin and the Vajrakīlaya as collected in the third volume.

[766] *mkha' 'gro gter rgya*, "the Treasure seal of the *ḍākinī*," refers to the full opening of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's mind to the reception of Treasures.

[767] *dgongs rgya grol*. Lit. "The seal of my mind was undone". Here bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje refers to the re-opening of his memory to the Ati-yoga rDzogs pa chen po's teachings that he already received in the past.

[768] *nge 'byung* (Skt. *niḥsaraṇa*), renunciation, one of three principal aspects of the way leading to *nirvāṇa* (*lam gyi gtso bo rnam gsum*). The other two are *byang sems* (Skt. *bodhicitta*), mind of enlightenment, and *yang dag pa'i lta ba* (Skt. *samyag dṛshṭi*), right view.

This is the end of the sketchy and brief history of an octogenarian,
Composed for the sake of one single knowledge that liberates all![769]

This has been composed to benefit all those who considered it necessary. bDud ’dul nus ldan rdo rje[770] communicated this at bSam bstan phug at the feet of O rgyan [rin po che][771] in the very solitude of gNas chen padma shel ri on a pleasant summer day of the earth-male tiger year of 1998.[772] It has been written by Nye gnas ye shes dpal[773].

Aspiciousness to all!

[769] *gcig shes kun grol*. The *rdzogs chen* teachings as a whole are also known as the “single knowledge that liberates all” meaning that already the intense practice of this system of contemplation will enable the practitioner to liberate himself.
[770] bDud ’dul nus ldan rdo rje is the Tantric name of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje.
[771] bSam gtan phug is a cave located on the south face of Mount gNas chen padma. Acording to bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and local villagers, Padmasambhava is believed to have been meditating in that cave.
[772] *sa mo stag*. This text has been written between the 20th and 27th of August, 1998.
[773] The ordination name of the nun bKra shis mtsho mo, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s personal attendant and scribe.

# Appendix Two: Texts in Transliteration

## Text 1: *bde chen rdo rje'i rnam thar phran bu*

bde chen rdo rje'i rnam thar phran bu ni/

bston pa mnyam med sha kya thub zhal snga nas/

sha rus bsags na ri rab gtos dang mnyam/

rnag khrag bsags na rgya mtsho chen po rtsam/

las 'phro bsags na bsam 'das brjod mi langs/

ces gsung pa ltar las snga phyi'i bya ba yod tshad na rnam grangs brjod las 'das pas/

gang zag so so'i spyod yul las 'das pa yin te mdor tsam brjod pa gzhir bstan pa ni/

gnas skabs pyi rgyal ba ang tong nis yos/

dka' ba dang dus lang ngal ba ched du bsad nas/

sa le ba 'khri phrag mang por brdud te don bnyer phyir du byon pa la ma ldog tsam du bdag gi lo rgyus mdor bsdus brjod pa las/

o rgyan chen po'i zhal snga nas/

dus ngan me ltar 'bar ba la/

gsang sngags nus pa me ltar 'bar/

de bzhin gsang sngags nyam len gyis/

bstan dang 'gro la phen par 'ong/

zhes lung gis gdams pa yin te/

rang la drag sngags skor bka' bab te nyams su blangs nas ming la nus ldan rdo rje zhes kun gyi 'bod pa de las byung ba'o/

zab gter bka' bab bde chen rdo rje'am 'od gsal rdo rje zhes 'bod pa ni/

rgyal dbang bcu drug pa rig pa'i rdoe rdo rje dang nyag bla byang chub rdo rje nas lung gis thebs pas kun gyis yid ches par byung ba'i don no/

de 'ang bod yul dbus gtsang khams gsum gyi skyes mchog dam pa mang po dang/

khyad par du bdag gi rtsa ba'i bla ma 'jam mgon bkra shis chos 'phel dang/

bka' dam rnying ma'i bla ma phu cog ngag dbang byams pa/

gru [= gro] mo dge bshes mchog dam pa rnams kyis ma 'ongs bstan la smin pa'i dgos gnad mang po gsung kyang tshig nyob don gi 'dir bsdus/

phun tshogs pho brang nas sa skya gong ma ’khri chen yab sras dang ka sras kong sprul bcas kyis bdag la dgos pa rdo rje’i tshig gis dbugs dbyung cing ma ’ongs bstan ’gro gso sman ’byung ’gyur gyi lung yang mang du thob/
de’ang sngon gyi smon lam mthu btsan pas/
dus dbang dang ’phral rkyen gang gis ma gos par sa gter dang dgongs gter gyi chos sde grangs mang bzhugs pa las/
’dir brjod bya’i rtsa ba mdo tsam zhus nas/
chos gter la bla ma [= bla med] sku gsum sgrub skor yang gsang chos sde la po ti bcu te thugs gter dang dag snang bka’ bab las bzhugs pa’o/
sngon sprul pa’i rig ’dzin chen po bdud ’dul hūm nag gling pa’i bka’ babs/
bka’ ’dus chos kyi rgya mtsho’i gtsug lag khang mthong ba don ldan bzhengs pa’i dus su/
sa gter rin chen sna lnga’i tshon dang rang byung rgyal mo’i bla g.yu nor mchog gzhan dang ’gran zla bral ba spyan drangs ba’i gter kha da lta yang phran bu re mthong rgyu yod/
gzhan yang rdzas gter ’od ’bar brag nas phur pa khrag ’thung ’bar ba/
mkha’ ’gro ’bum rdzong nas rig ’dzin ’dus pa’i zab gter/
rdzing rgyal brag nas ’chi med tshe’i bum gter/
gnas chen padma shel ri nas myong grol bdud rtsi chos sman sgrom bu sogs dang/
gzhan yang ngo mtshar ba’i rdzas gter mang lang kyang ’dir ma smon so/
bod yul sde gsum rgud pa’i skabs la’ang gter kha dang bya ba kun nas nub med sor chud rje btsun bla ma’i rjes su bzung ba’i rnam thar du ma nyid las kyang/
da thengs skal ldan dam pa rnams kyi spyod yul ngo mtshar dus kyi gso sman la thugs tshims par mdzad phyir phran bu bzhugs pa rnams la/
ma ’ongs du kyi ’khor lo’i dkyil ’khor rabs ’byams las kyang bsam gtan lha yi go cha rnams dang/
g.yul zlog ’phrug gyi ’khor lo sogs ’byung ’gyur gyi lung bstan sogs smon lam dgos so/
de’ang sngon gyi smon lam zab mo’i mthu’i/
’di ltar gyis pa’i rnam dkar bya ba rnams/
lhag med sgrub la brtson pa’i don ’di ni/
bston [= ston] pa gnyis pa padma sam bha was/
bod yul zhal gzigs bstan pa spel ba’i tshe/
’khor gyi thog ma ngan lam rigs ’khrungs dang/
dpal gyi seng ge grub pa mchog thob nas/

ma ’ongs bstan ’gro’i don du smon lam mthu/
smin pa mkhyen sprul bde chen gling pas gsung/
mkhas mchog grub brnyes ’jam dpal nor bu dang/
khams pa sku zhabs don gyud nyi ma sogs/
skyes mchog du mas bdag la lung bstan ni/
gling gi dus nas seng chen zhabs drung du/
kun dga’ nyi [ma] zhes bya’i lus rten dang/
’gro mgron [= mgon] ye pa chen po’i nye gnas ba/
bya me lha mchog zhes bya’i skye ba blang/
de nas ’dus byas lhag ma mi rtag yang/
nges med rigs su skye ba mang po byung/
de la sogs te rnam thar mtha’ yas kyang/
mkhas mchog rnams kyi gnyigs lam phran [bu] ’o/

## Text 2: *rig ’dzin nus ldan rdo rje’i rnam thar bsdus pa dri med rdo rje’i zlos gar*

**[f. 1a]** rig ’dzin nus ldan rdo rje’i rnam thar bsdus pa dri med rdo rje’i zlos gar /

**[f. 1b]** chos sku snang mtha’ longs sku spyan ras gzigs/
sprul sku pad ’byung rig ’dzin dga’ rab [rdo] rje/
’jam dpal bshes gnyen dang ni nā’ ga dzu/
hūm chen kā ra dgongs brda snyan brgyud dang/
shog gser tshig brgyud smon lam gtad rgya brgyud/
gang zag las can lung zin brgyud pa bcas/
’gro la phan bde’i mdzad pa rgyun mi chad/
**[f. 2a]** dus gsum rtag tu rgyal ba’i phrin las la/
gang la gang ’dul de la der sten pa/
sgyu ’phrul rgya mtsho’i zhabs la phyag ’tshal bstod/
de’ang grub pa’i rig ’dzin mkhyen sprul bde chen gling pa’i
sprul pa’i zlos gar nyi zla’i dpal ltar bstan par mdzad pa’i dus lang pas/
ji skad du/

dpa’ bo chen po thabs mkhas te/

**[f. 2b]** bye ba phrag brgyar rgyal ba nyid/

sangs rgyas nyid du bstan gyur cing/

da dang du ni ’dren pa khyod/

sangs rgyas mang por bstan par mdzad zhes dang/

gzhan yang/

bzo dang skye dang byang chub che/

mya ngan ’das pa rtag ston pa/

sangs rgyas sprul pa’i sku de ni/

rnam par grol ba’i thabs che’o/

zhes gsungs pa ltar/

mchog gi rig ’dzin kun bzang bde chen sprul pa’i sku ’jig rten gyi sgron me ’char ba’i dus ’dir nges pa de ltar dang/

’on kyang phyogs ’di’i gdul bya rnams kyi dad ’dun dang smon lam sogs kyi rten ’brel gyi stobs kyis te/

bla ma dgongs ’dus kyi lung bstan bka’ rgya ma las/

mkhas pa’i yang rab bī ma mi tra yang/

’khrul zhig las kyi skye ba ma yin te/

phung po lhag med kun bzang che ba’i mchog/

**[f. 3a]** nyid kyi sprul pa yang sprul ’bum phrag gis/

’gro don dpag med mdzad pa smon [= smos] ci dgos/

zhes dang rtsa gzhung gnad byang las/

da lta’i chos rgyal khri srong nam mkha’i snying/

bī ma mi tra [g]sum sprul sku’i tshul du ni/

’dab chags lo pa rdo rje’i ming can ’byung/

de yis dus bab gter nas rtsal ba’i tshe/

smon lam las mtha’ ma log ’ga’ zhig gis/

bod khams bstan dang ’gro la phan par ’ong/

zhes dang mchog gling gnas chen nyer lnga’i mdo byang las/

de dus nam mkha’i chos las thog bab bzhin/

padma’i grub pa de yi yang sprul du/

padma sa manta bha dra zhes sam/

padma'i snying po rgyal po zhes bya byung/

padma bdag dang dngos mnyam[s] **[f. 3b]** khri srong rje/

gcig tu 'dus pa'i sgyu ma'i rol gar ba/

'brel tshad don ldan mkhyen mchog bde chen gling/

der 'phrad kun bzang bstan pa dar bar 'gyur/

zhes dang sku gsum rang grol las/

snyigs ma yang snyigs nye ba ru/

tshe lo nye [= nyi] shu kha ral dus/

chos rgyal nam snying bī ma la/

[g]sum sprul bde chen gling pa'i sras/

ma 'ongs las can rjes rdor ba/

rnal 'byor sgyu ma'i skyes bu zhig/

rdo rje'i ming can 'dab chags lo/

chung nas 'khor ba nges 'byung skye/

da lta'i bag chags ma brjed mod/

ma sbyong rig pa ngang gis sad/

ma bslab shes bya'i gnas kun gsal/

khyad par grub pa'i nyams rtog[s] can/

mthong thos 'brel tshad rnga yab 'dren/

**[f. 4a]** mthar thug bla med go 'phang 'god/

zhes sogs rgyal ba rnams kyi yul las gzhan min na/

bslu med rdo rje'i lung gi bsngags pas phul/

chags thogs sgrib pa'i sbub las yongs grol ba/

de ni thams cad mkhyen pa'i ye shes te/

zhes pa ltar/

bdag cag gi ston pa grub pa'i dbang phyug sa manta bha dra'i lung gis bsngag shing bka' yi cod pan spyi bor bskul nas/

zab gsang rdo rje theg pa'i yang zhun/

yang gsang gab rgya man ngag spyi ti'i las mtha' ma lus pa bum pa gang byo'i tshul du bskur nas skye ba bcu gsum bar du 'brel ba'i dam tshig las mi 'da' bar lung gis gdams te gnang ba'i bka' zab yid bzhin nor bu'i sde tshan/

ma 'ongs bstan 'gro'i **[f. 4b]** dpal du bzhugs pa lags na/

da ris [= res] dus bab kyi sgo 'phar gang nas kyang yong ba'i skabs 'dir/

smon lam gyi chad par dus la bab pa'i dbang du 'byor bas/

brjod gzhi tsam gyi rnam thar bskul ba po blo gsal mig ldan 'khor slob du ma dang/

khyad par don gnyer mkhan phyi rgyal ba ang tang ni yos nan bskul ched du brgyad bcu pa pra bha swa ra'i skyes rabs snga phyi mang po brjod pa sor bzhag/

mdor tsam gleng ba skye ba 'di nyid ni/

bod yul gangs can ljongs dbus shar gyi phyogs/

mdo khams sa yi dpal mchog 'bri zla sgang/

gnas drug gtso bo rdo ti gangs dkar gyi/

mdun ngos g.yas phyogs g.yu mtsho sngon mo dang/

rag rdzong ri bo dpal ri'i gnas mchog che'i/

**[f. 5a]** mdun du ma tshogs mkha 'gro 'du ba'i sa/

'dzam mo dkar mo zhes grags padma'i tshal/

g.yas phyogs ha ri dge bsnyen nor dbyig 'bar/

rgyab tu g.yu rtse ri bo spung la mtho/

g.yon gyi phyogs na dpa' bo'i zlos gar 'khrab/

mthong na yid 'phrog 'gro bas dang ba 'dren/

rtag tu 'ja' tshon sna lnga'i gur khang 'khyil/

rnga gling rol mo'i sgra dang snyan pa'i glu/

ngo mtshar bcas te rgyun par rang sgra 'ur/

gnas der phyin tshad ma 'ongs gu ru'i drung/

zhal mjal dbugs dbyung lung thob rtsal chen rdzogs/

bsngo smon las 'phro ldan rnams byang chub sems/

mi nyams gong 'phel sgrib pa gtan der byang/

rig 'dzin rgyal ba'i sras su dbang bsgyur ro/

**[f. 5b]** zhes pa padma 'byung nas zhul gyis bzhes/

hūm mdzad sprul pa rol pa rdo rjes gsung/

bdag kyang sngon smon dus bab gnas mchog der/

rab lo bco lnga'i nang gses lcags bya lo'i/

dbyar ra sa ga zla ba'i bco lnga nyin/

’gro ba brgya phrag sogs kyi mthong lam du/
ngo mtshar ltas bcas bzang po’i rtags mtshan rnams/
kun gyis brjod bya sna tshogs bcas te bltams/
dam pa du mas bsngags brjod legs par thob/
yul du dge mtshan yun gnas bkra shis so/
de nas lo bdun gong nas ri sul ’grim/
nyams dang rmi lam sgang ba che cher ’bar/
skye sngon las kyi rjes mthu’i gu ru dang/
chos rgyal yab sras rje ’bangs grogs lnga mjal/
bcu gnyis lo bar smyos **[f. 6a]** pa’i brtul zhugs spyad/
snang srid lha ’dre rnams dang ’gro gleng byas/
’gro ba mi yi spyod lam ma bsten pa/
dben dang dur khrod tshal mtsho gling bsten/
bcu gsum nar son yul gyi gshed mas sdang/
rkyen des las gyur sngon gyi smon lam mthu’i/
mkhan chen bla ma bkra shis chos ’phel mjal/
nā ro mkha’ spyod gdams pa yongs rdzogs thob/
nyams dang rmi lam dge mtshan ldan gsung bsngags/
sgrib sbyong phyir du jo bo mjal phyag ’tshal/
sgyu ma’i nor la ma ’khor rkyen ngan ldog/
lha ldan dbus gnas yongs rdzogs phyag bskor thob/
khyad par phu cog byams mgon zhal mjal tshe/
khams pa’i spu gu shin tu legs ces bstod/
dga’ ldan lha brgya’i **[f. 6b]** khrid lung sdom pa thob/
bdag kyang snang sems dbang bsgyur mkha’ la gdengs [= lding]/
de tshe kun gyis bstod cing bsngags pa brjod/
bla ma’i gsang gsum dbyer med ro [= ngo] gcig rdzogs/
nyams dang rtogs pa’i rtsal mchog che cher ’bar/
’jig rten chos brgyad snang ba’i zhan pa [= zhen pa] chod/
de nas mon ’brug ’bras ljongs rgya gar shar/
gnas chen rnams la song te bskor ba’i tshe/
mi dang mi min kun gyis mthun sbyor nas/

’jigs pa gang gis ma gos bde blag du/

grub pa’i dbang phyug gru [= gro] mo dge bshes mjal/

zhabs tu btud tshe rin chen ril bu dang/

thun mong ma yin blo sbyong khyad ’phags gnang/

ma ’ongs ’gro phan ’byung zhes lung yang ’byin/

de nas **[f. 7a]** gtsang dbus sa skya’i gdan par slebs/

bka’ srung rnams kyis bslang [= lhong] tshad che cher bsten/

’ga’ res zhal byon ’ga’ res cho ’phrul ’gyed/

bdag la snang srid sgyu ma sems su chud/

khri chen skyabs mgon phun tshogs pho brang nas/

gzhan med mtshungs bral bka’ yi bsngags brjod mdzad/

zang zing nor dang chos sbyin lta ba sprad/

ma ’ongs don du gsung gleng sna tshogs thob/

de nas gtsang gnas chos ’khor yongs rdzogs mjal/

khyad par can gyi gnas mchog mang po bskor/

nges ’byung skyo shas rtsol med lhun gyis grub/

bdag ’dzin snang ba’i zhan [= zhen] chags dri ma dag/

de nas dpal gyi mtshur phu’i gdan sar phyin/

rgyal ba’i dbang po rig pa’i **[f. 7b]** rdo rje mjal/

dgongs brgyud bdag ’phos thugs yid dbyer med ’dres/

nyams dang rtog[s] pa’i rig pa’i rtsal shugs skyes/

mngon shes thogs med ’char te lung bstan thob/

ma ’ongs don phyir ’ja’ tham chen mo gnang/

bstan ’gror phan phyir khyad par don yod gsung/

khams phyogs sgrub rgyud bstan pa’i mnga’ gsol mdzad/

de nas bal bod khams phyogs yul ljongs che’i/

dam pa’i skyes bu rnams dang mig ldan bus/

padma’i pho nya bsngags brjod spyi bor bskul/

chos nor rdzas kyi gter kha sna tshogs drangs/

skal dman phal pa’i ’gro rnams re ’ga’ las/

’brel tshad don ldan ’di bde’i nges shes thob/

rnam dkar can rnams phyi ma'i sgrib **[f. 8a]** byang brnyed/
dus snyigs rgud pa'i bar bskal ldang ba sel/
de nas sngon gyi smon lam mthu btsan pas/
ma hā gu ru dbyer med grub pa'i mchog/
mkhyen sprul bde chen gling pa'i zhal snga na/s
gu ru'i lung bstan bka' bab brgyud pa gtad/
drag sngags gling sogs smon lam khyad 'phags ba/
chos rgyal gdung [b]rgyud sprul pa'i rig 'dzin lnga/
mchog gi bka' gter dam pa rnam pa gsum/
dam ldan [b]rgyud 'dzin bcas te lung yang bsten/
bstan pa spyi dang dus kyi rgud pa ru/
mun pa'i bskal pa ngan pa zhi ba'i thabs/
khyad par can du yang gsang snying thig bskor/
bka' rgya bcas te legs par dkrol te spel/
ji skad gsung rnams o rgyan dbyer **[f. 8b]** med pas/
nges shes thob te bdag la bka' yang dbab/
de phyir don chen sgrub la gnyer 'os kyang/
spyi mthun las la g.yo bzur [= zol] med pa'i stabs/
bka' rnams ji bzhin bkrol ba'i snod ldan dang/
yid ches thob pa'i 'gro ba myung [= nyung] lags pas/
re zhig 'gyang sogs don khel ma gyur yang/
dus bab tshe na gang gar spyad te spel/
khyad par rgyal sras mu rub btsan po yi/
nam phrul gter chen byang chub rdo rje yis/
rig pa'i rtsal dbang bskur te brda lung gis/
zin pa'i brgyud 'dzin brgya phrag mang po dang/
'gro don mtha' rgyas nyi zla ltar gsal ba/
o rgyan lung las 'byung ba yod do bcas/
gong der bskul zhing mnga' gsol **[f. 9a]** rgya chen gnang/
bstan pa'i gsol la bsngags pa'i lung bstan no/
de nas brtsams te gter chen phran bcas/

gter kha mang po gter nas stsal [= btsal] ba la/
dus dbang gyur dang spyi mthun las bsags mthu'i/
bstan 'gro dpal la smin pa rgya cher dben/
de 'og dus sbyor rtsub dang las dbang gis/
bstan 'gro spyi dang khyad par sngon las can/
bod yul smag rum 'char dang rgud pa'i dbang/
rang rang bden 'bras rgyud la smin pa'i skabs/
bdag la padma'i byin rlabs khyad par gyis/
bka' srung rnams kyis ma la bu gcig ltar/
skyabs srung grogs dang phrin las rmad byung bas/
gzhan gyi rgol ba ngan pa kun las rgyal/
**[f. 9b]** dus kyi 'pho 'gyur rgud pa cung sos nas/
skye 'gro'i dpal la zla zer phog pa nas/
'gro ba'i don phyir dben pa'i gnas la bsten/
bka' zab nyams blangs yang dag don la sbyong/
smon lam dus bab rig pa'i rtsal chen rdzogs/
rgyal ba'i thugs bskyed rmad byung khyad par bas/
yang gsang sgrub skor don gnyer smon pa bzhin/
bka' bab lung bstan mkha' 'gro'i gter rgya thob/
zab gsang yang bsngags theg mchog rdzogs pa che/
a ti bla med rgyud rnams dgongs rgya grol/
las smon skal ldan brgyud 'dzin brgya phrag 'ga'/
smin grol mthar phyin nges 'byung legs par thob/
phyi nang nyes tshogs gegs can **[f. 10a]** 'phrang mtha' dag/
drag sngags nus pa'i dbal 'byin rgol ba 'joms/
'on kyang snyigs ma'i rang mdangs cher 'bar bas/
skal dman rtog ge'i nang sel [= gsal] log lta'i mthu'i [= mthus]/
bstan pa spyi dang bstan 'dzin dam pa yi/
phrin las rgya mtsho'i dpal la rlabs kyis bcom/
nges don sgron me'i mdangs la ser bus sdang/
mtha' dbus kun tu nyon mongs rba rlabs phyur/
de ltar bar gyi tshigs [= tshig] pas ldang pa la/

zab chos yang snying ’dus pa khyad ’phags ba/
kun bzang thugs tig yang gsang snying po’i skor/
bla ma dpal chen ’jam dpal gshin rje’i gshed/
yi dam kun ’dus yang gsang rta mgrin skor/
ma rgyud mkha’ ’gro’i chos sde **[f. 10b]** gsang chen lam/
phrin las zab mo dregs ’joms rdo rje phur/
drag sngags yongs ’dus drang srong dmod pa’i rgyud/
rtsa ba gcig ’dus gu ru sgrub pa’i chos/
rgya chen drangs ba’i brgyad bcu rgan po yi/
lo rgyus mdor bsten tshig nyung don bsdus pa/
gcig shes kun grol phyir du sbyar ba’o/

ces pa ’di bzhin dgos gal che ba kun gyis bskul ba’i don du rig ’dzin ming khur bdud ’dul nus ldan rdo rjes/ rab lo bcu bdun pa’i sa pho stag lo’i dbyar ra ba’i dus tshes bzang po’i nyin ’dir gnas chen padma shel ri’i yang dben o rgyan zhabs ’og/ bsam gtan phug tu smras rim/ nye gnas ye shes dpal nas bris pa/ sarba mang ga lam//

## Text 3: *don zab gnad smin shel dkar me long*

**[f. 1a]** yang gsang rdo rje me char gyi rgyud las/
snga ’gyur rdo rje theg pa’i rtsa ba kun/
rgyal ba gnyis pa padma sam bha was/
snying thig gser zhun dam pa’i bka’ rgya las/
rig ’dzin mang po don du ’gyur dgos ched/
gsungs phyir tshig nas ’bru re btus nas kyang/
don zab gnad smin shel dkar me long ’di/
spyi rabs rtog ge’i rnyogs pa sel ba’i thabs/
mun sel sgron me skal ldan don du sbyin/
sa ma ya/
**[f. 1b]** snga ’gyur mdo sngags lung byang phal po che/
gsol bstod ’dod pa’i grub pa’i rtogs ldan ’ga’ shas/

rgyal ba'i bstan pa mi nyams sor chud phyir/

zab don dgongs pa lta ba'i rgyun bzhag zhig/

zhus pas mtsho rgyal [gyi]  ma 'ongs don gyi slad/

gser phreng rin po che'i sgrom bu las/

btus te tha snyad rnyog [= rnyogs] pa gsal ba'i thabs/

gcig shes kun grol padma'i gsang mdzod ltar/

zab gsang rdzogs pa chen po'i nyams len bu'i/

u rgyan gsungs la gtan bkal [= gtan 'khel] yid ches bsgoms/

ces gsungs pa ltar /

'dir snga 'gyur bstan pa'i srol 'dzin rig 'dzin gong ma rnams kyi [= kyis] thun mong ma yin pa'i nye rgyud zab gsang rdo rje theg pa'i sgor zhugs na dgos pa khyad par dgongs nas/

spyi rabs don gnyer mkhan la khyad du med na mi rung bas dgongs pa'i mthil gtad te gnang ba las/

(in the pages below the text continues together with a correspondance outline between the actual section from bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's *snga 'gyur* [f. 2a - f. 8a] and the sixth chapter from bDud 'joms Rinpoche's *rNying ma'i chos 'byung* [pp. 411-419]

| | *Shin tu zab pa nye brgyud gter ma'i lo rgyus mdo tsam brjod pa* from *bdud 'joms chos 'byung*, Chengdu: Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 1996, pp. 411-419. |
|---|---|
| shin tu **[f. 2a]** zab gsang nye rgyud gter gyi lo rgyus mdo tsam brjod par bya na / de la 'ang klu'i rgyal po'i zhus pa'i mdo las / dkon mchog gsum gyi gdung mi chad pa'i gter chen po mi zad pa dang / chos rtogs pa chen po mi zad pa tshad med pa'i gter chen po dang / sems can 'gu [= mgu] bar bya ba'i mi zad pa gter chen po dang / nam mkha' dang mnyams [= mnyam] pa'i mi zad pa'i gter | [p. 411] da ni shin tu zab pa nye brgyud gter ma'i lo rgyus mdo tsam brjod par bya ste / de'ang klu'i rgyal pos zhus pa'i mdo las / dkon mchog gsum gyi gdun mi chad pa'i gter chen po mi zad pa dang / chos rtogs pa chen po tshad med pa gter chen po mi zad pa dang / sems can mgu bar bya ba'i gter chen po mi zad pa dang / nam mkha' dang mnyams pa'i |

chen po ste / bzhi po de dag ni gter chen po mi zad pa yin no / zhes pa dang / gter gyi ngo bo'am rang bzhin bstan zhing de bzhing du 'phags pa bsod nams thams cad sdud pa'i ting nge 'dzin gyi mdo las / dri ma med pa'i gzi brjid chos 'dod pa'i byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po rnams kyi[s] / chos kyi gter ri dang ri sul dang shing dag gi nang du bcug pa yang yod de / gzungs dang chos kyi sgo mtha' yas pa gleg bam [= glegs bam] du byas pa **[f. 2b]** dag kyang lag tu 'ong[s] bar 'gyur ro / zhes pas kyang gter chos dang / gter gnas dang 'don pa po'i gang zag bcas legs par bstan / bsam pa phun gsum tshogs pa ni / gal te sangs rgyas mi bzhugs kyang nam mkha'i dkyil dang / rtsig[s] pa dang shing rnams las 'byung ngo / zhes pa gnam chos phyogs kyang bstan pa dang / gzhan yang yongs su grags pa'i mdo rgyud ci rigs pa las / gter gyi ngo bo nges tshig rnam grangs dgos pa sogs yang nas yang du bstan pa ni / 'phags bod gnyis du grags pa las bod yul lta bu'i gang zag re re'i [= re res] gsar du bcos pa ma yin zhing / gter du sbas pa'i dgos pa'ang / chu klung rol pa'i mdo las / nga yi bstan pa'i chos kyi gzhung / thugs nas thugs kyi gter du sbos / yang na sa yi snying por bya / ci phyir mu stegs can mgo rgod / de don dkrugs par 'gyur ta re [= sta re] / de phyir chu klung rgyun mi bcod **[f. 3a]** ces dang / chos rgyal ratna gling pa'i gter lung las / shin tu zab pa'i mthar thug snying po rnams / snyigs ma'i 'gro la lhag par snying brtse bas / mtha' dbus

gter chen po mi zad pa ste / bzhi po de dag ni gter chen po mi zad pa yin no / zhes pas gter gyi ngo bo'am rang bzhin bstan cing / de bzhin du 'phags pa bsod nams thams cad sdud pa'i ting nge 'dzin mdo las / dri ma med pa'i gzi brjid chos 'dod pa'i byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po rnams kyis chos kyi gter ri dang / ri sul dang / shing dag gyi nang du bcug pa dag yod de / [p. 412] gzungs dang chos kyi sgo mtha' yas pa glegs bam du byas pa dag kyang lag tu 'ongs par 'gyur ro / zhes pas kyang gter chos / gter gnas / 'don pa po'i gang zag bcas legs par bstan / bsam pa phun sum tshogs pa la ni gal te sangs rgyas mi zhugs kyang nam mkha'i dkyil dang rtsigs pa dang shing rnams las chos 'byung ngo / zhes pas gnam chos sogs kyang bstan pa dang / gzhan yang yongs su grags pa'i mdo rgyud ci rig pa las gter gyi ngo bo / nges tshig / rnam grangs / dgos pa sogs yang nas yang du bstan pa ni 'phags bod gnyis su grags pa las / bod yul lta bu'i gang zag re res gsar du bcos pa ming cing / gter du sbed pa'i dgos pa'ang / chu klung rol pa'i mdo las / nga yi bstan pa'i chos kyi gzhung / thugs nas thugs kyi gter du sbos / yang na sa yi snying por bya / ci phyir mu stegs can mgo rgod / des don dkrug par 'gyur ta re / de phyir chu klung rgyun mi gcod / ces dang / chos rgyal ratna gling pa'i gter lung las / shin tu zab pa'i mthar thug snying po rnams / spyir yang bod rnams gsar ngas che ba dang / snyigs ma'i 'gro la lhag par snying brtse bas / mtha' dbus thams cad gter gyis bkang nas bzhag / las can bu dang

thams cad gter gyi bkang nas bzhag / las can bu dang ’phrad pa’i smon lam btab / ma ’ongs dus su rtog ge tha snyed [= tha snyad] mkhan / sgom chen la sogs phyogs dang ris dregs can / rang che ’byin zhing gter la brtsod pa na / snyigs ma’i chos byed phal cher gter gyi ’dren / zab la kha tshang ma ’grib mtha’ rgyas shing / gdam pa sna res gang zag grol bar nges / de bas las sad skal ldan sbyang pa can / ’chi ba dran na gter chos nyams su long / tshe gcig sangs rgyas thob bo rjes ’jug rnams / snyigs dus gter la mos pa’i skal ldan kun / dengs sang gu ru’i zhal mthong smon lam thob / thams cad las can yin pas dga’ ba bsgoms / kho mo’i tshig ’di rin chen gser las dkon **[f. 3b]** ces sogs / gter kha gzhan las kyang mtha’ yas pa ’byung ba ltar dang / snyigs ma’i dus su bka’ ma rnams tsheng [= tshong] dus kyi ’o ma bzhing dbang dang gdam ngag gi bka’ chad [= bka’ ’chal] cing rgyud [= brgyud] pa mang pos bar du chad pa dam tshig gi sel dang ’dres khyer gyi slad [= bslad] zhugs pa mang bas byin rlabs kyi bab so nyams pa yin la / gter du bzhugs pa rnams ni gter ston sprul sku de nyid u rgyan chen po dngos kyi rjes su bzungs te sming grol dbang dang gdam pa ma lus pa’i bka’ gtad thob cing / zab chos mkha’ ’gro’i kha rlangs ma yal ba spyan drang pas na / nye rgyud [= nye brgyud] byin rlabs kyi gzi byin ’gran zla dang bral ba’o / de ’ang gter gyi phyogs ’di dgongs brda snyan brgyud kyi sdeng du khyad par gyi brgyud pa gsum dang ldan pa’i

’phrad pa’i smon lam btab / ma ’ongs dus su rtog ge tha snyad mkhan / sgom chen la sogs phyogs dang ris dregs can / rang che ’byin cing gter la rtsod na yang / snyigs [p. 413] ma’i chos byed phal cher gter gyi ’dren / zab la kha tshang ma bsgribs mtha’ rgyas shing / gdams pa sna res gang zag grol par nges / de bas las sad skal ldan sbyangs pa can / ’chi ba dran na gter chos nyams su longs / tshe gcig thar lam thob bo rjes ’jug rnams / snyigs dus gter la mos pa’i skal ldan kun / deng sang gu ru’i shal mthong smon lam btab / thams cad las can yin pas dga’ ba sgoms / kho mo’i tshig ’di rin chen gser bas dkon / ces sogs gter kha gzhan las kyang mtha’ yas pa ’byung ba ltar / snyigs ma’i dus su bka’ ma rnams tshong dus kyi ’o ma bzhin dbang gdams ngag gi bka’ ’chal zhing / brgyud pa mang po bar du chod pas dam tshig gi sel dang ’dres ’khyer gyi bslad zhugs pa mang bas byin rlabs kyi babs so nyams par ’gyur ba yin la / gter du bzhugs pa rnams ni gter ston sprul sku de nyid o rgyan chen po dngos kyis rjes su bzung ste smin grol dbang dang gdams pa ma lus pa’i bka’ gtad thob cing zab chos mkha’ ’gro’i kha rlangs ma yal bar spyan drangs pas na nye brgyud byin rlabs kyi gzi byin ’gran zla dang brel ba’o / de’ang gter gyi phyogs ’dir dgongs brda’ snyan brgyud pa steng du khyad par gyi brgyud pa gsum dang ldan pa’i phyir brgyud pa drug ldan du grags pa ste / dgomgd brda snyan brgyud gsum gong du smos pa ltar la / smon

phyir / brgyud pa drug ldan du grags pa ste / dgongs brda snyan brgyud gsum gong du smos pa ltar la / smon lam dbang bskur **[f. 4a]** ni / gter kha de nyid la dbang pa'i gang zag des thob par shog ces sogs bden tshig mon lam gyi rgyas btab par mdzad pa dang bka' bab lung bstan ni / gter 'byin skyes bu de la mtshan bya don gyi yes shes dgongs pa'i mthil gtad nas / 'byung 'gyur gyi lung bstan dang bcas dbugs dbyung ba la bya / mkha' 'gro gter rgya [= gtad rgya] ni mtshon byed brda'i yi ge tshig rgyud [= tshig brgyud] du bkod nas / rdo rje'i brag g.yang zhags kyi mtsho mi 'gyur pa'i sgrom la sogs pa gter bdag so so la gnyer byang gtad nas mi snang bar rgyas gdab pa nyid slar lung bstan dus la bab / smon lam gyi mthu smin / las kyi 'phro sad / gter bdag gi bskul ma byas / kha byang yod pa dang med pa ji snyed pa'i zab gter gyi sgrom bu ji bzhin

*gter ston nyid kyi phyag tu son pa rnams so / khyad par gter du bzhugs* **[f. 4.b]** *ya [= pa]'i zab chos phal mo che mkha' 'gro brda'i yi ges bcings pa ste / skal mnyams kyi gang zag las gzhan gyi[s] khrol mi srid pas na / u rgyan chen po'i bka' rtags phyag rgya'i ri mo dngos la thug pas / gang zag phal pa'i brgyud pas bar du mi chod cing khung btsun pa dang brda ma bcos / tshig ma 'khrul don ma nor ba mkha' 'gro'i gsang ba'i brda brgyur bas gzhung zab cing byin rlabs che ba dang / skal ba dang mi ldan pa'i gang zag*

lam dbang bskur ni gter [p. 414] kha de nyid la dbang pa'i gang zag des thon par shog ces bden tshig smon lam gyi rgyas btab par mdzadpa dang / bka' babs lung bstan ni gter byin skyes bu de la mtshon bya don gyi ye shes'dgongs pa'i mthil gtad nas 'byung 'gyur gyi lung bstan dang bcas dbugs dbyung ba la bya / mkha' 'gro gtad rgya ni mtshon byed brda'i yi ge tshig brgyud du bkod nas rdo rje'i brag / g.yang zhag gi mtsho / mi 'gyur ba'i sgrom la sogs par gter bdag so so la gnyer byang gtad nas mi snang bar rgyas btab pa nyid slar lung bstan dus la babs / smon lam gyi mthu smin / las kyi 'phro sad / gter bdag gi bskul ma byas / kha byang yod pa dang med pa ji snyed pa'i zab gter gyi sgrom bu ji bzhin pa yin no //

*blo ji ltar bsgrim kyang dmus long gis glang chen bskyed pa ltar phyogs tsam yang brtag mi bzod pas / gter 'byin skyes bu nyid phal pa'i spyod yul las 'das pa yid ches pa yin no* /

de yang bod kyi yul 'dir bstan pa'i snying po gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa spyi dang khyad par zab mo gter gyi 'phrin las 'dul bya mtha' yas pa 'dul bar mdzad pa po ni / sangs rgyas gnyis pa padma 'byung gnas te / **[f. 5a]** myang 'das kyi mdo las / nga ni mya ngan 'das 'og tu / lo ni bcu dang gnyis tsam nas / dha na ko sha'i mtsho gling du nga bas lhag pa'i skyes bu 'byung / zhes lung bstan ltar / slob dpon chen po 'di nyid lam rim bgrod kyi gang zag 'am sa la gnas pa'i 'phags pa tsam ma yin pa / mi dang mi ma yin pa 'dul dka' ba rnams thabs sna tshogs pas 'dul ba'i slad du / sangs rgyas 'od dpag med dang mnyam med shakya'i rgyal po'i sprul pa'i sku bstan pa yin la / de'i rnam par thar pa 'phags chen rnams kyi cha tsam brjod pa mi nus mod / mdo tsam gong du smon pa ltar la / khyad par phrin las kyi che ba ma 'ongs pa'i 'dul bya dang bstan pa'i btsas su dgongs nas rgya bal bod yul rnams su chos nor dang sman rtsis dam rdzas la sogs pa gter kha bgrangs gi mi long ba zhig **[f. 5b]** sbas mdzad pa las /

*gtso bo gangs can yul 'dir 'dul bya gang la gang 'dul gyi thabs la mkhas pas / chos sgo spyi dang khyad par yo ga rnam pa gsum dang 'brel ba'i rgyud lung man ngag las*

de'ang bod kyi yul 'dir bstan pa'i snying po gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa spyi dang khyad par zab mo gter gyi phrin las kyis 'dul bya mtha' yas pa gdul bar mdzad pa po ni sangs rgyas gnyis pa padma 'byung gnas te / myang 'das kyi mdo las / nga ni mya ngan 'das 'og tu / lo ni bcu dang gnyis tsam nas / dha na ko sha'i mtsho gling du / nga bas lhag pa'i skyes bu 'byung / zhes lung bstan pa ltar / slob dpon chen po 'di nyid lam rim bgrod kyi gang zag gam sa la gnas pa'i 'phags pa tsam ma yin par / mi dang mi ma yin gdul dka' ba rnams thabs sna tshogs pas 'dul ba'i slad du / sangs rgyas 'od dpag med dang mnyam med shākya'i rgyal po sogs sprul pa'i skur bstan pa yin pas de'i rnam par thar pa 'phags chen rnams kyi kyang cha tsam brjod pa mi nus mod / mdo tsam gong du smos pa ltar la / khyad par phrin las kyi che ba ma 'ongs pa'i gdul bya dang bstan pa'i btsas su dgongs nas rgya bal bod yul rnams su chos nor sman rtsis rten dang dam rdzas la sogs pa gter kha bgrang gis mi lang ba zhig sbas par mdzad pa las /

[…]

*tshogs mtha' yas par gsungs / de thams cad gsang ba'i bdag mo dbyings phyug ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi mi brjod pa'i gzungs kyis bzung nas bka' yi bsdu bar mdzad /*

shog ser rigs lngar mkha' 'gro'i brda yi yi ger bkod / gter snod sna tshogs pa 'byung bas mi 'jigs pas [= mi 'jigs pa'i] rgyal gdams / gter gnas so so ru gu ru yab yum dang rjes 'bangs lhan cig bcas kyis sbas te gter srung la gnyer du gtad / khyad par gu ru rnga yab gling du gshegs pa'i rjes su mtsho rgyal nyid lo brgya lhag tsam bzhugs nas bod yul stod smad bar gsum la gter kha bsam gyis mi khyab pa sbas nas gter zhabs gdams / gzhan yang **[f. 6a]** lo paṇ grub thob rjes 'bangs du mas gter kha grangs med du sbas pa rnams phyis 'dul ba'i dus su phyin pa'i tshe ma 'ongs pa gter la longs spyod cing 'gro don 'byung bar byin gyi brlabs te lung bstan smon lam thebs pa'i rjes 'bangs skal ldan rnams kyi skye ba dang sprul pa'i sgyu 'phrul rigs dang spyod pa la nges pa rim par byon nas / bstan 'gro'i don mdzad pa rnams ni gtso bo sa gter gyi byon tshul dang zab mo dag snang dang dgongs pa'i gter gyi 'byung tshul ni / de'ang byan chub sems dpa' rnams kyi smon lam gyi khyad par lus can rnams kyi bya dang ni / shing dang 'od zer thams cad dang / nam mkha' las kyang chos kyi sgra / rgyun mi 'chad par thob par shog / ces pa ltar / smon lam gyi mthu btsan pa dang de dag la chos kyi 'phongs pa'i rgyu med pa'i phyir

[p. 416] shog ser rigs lngar mkha' 'gro'i brda yi yi ger bkod / gter snod sna tshogs par 'byung bas mi 'jigs pa'i rgyas gdams / gter gnas so sor gu ru yab yum kho na dang rjes 'bangs lhan cig pa bcas kyis sbas te gter srung la gnyer du gtad / khyad par gu ru rnga yab gling du gshegs pa'i rjes su mtsho rgyal nyid mi lo brgya lhag tsam bzhugs nas bod yul stod smad bar gsum la gter kha bsam gyis mi khyab pa sbas nas gter zhabs bsdams / gzhan yang paṇ chen bi ma la mi tra / chos rgyal yab sras / lo chen bai ro tsa na / gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes dang nam mkha'i snying po / gnyags dzanyā na ku mā ra dang sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms / nyang ban ting 'dzin bzang po sogs kyis kyang zab gter mang du sbas pa rnams / phyis 'dul ba'i dus su son pa'i tshe ma 'ongs par gter la spyod cing 'gro don 'byung bar byin gyis brlabs te lung bstan smon lam thebs pa'i rjes 'bangs skal ldan rnams kyi skye ba dang sprul pa'i sgyu 'phrul rigs dang spyod pa ma nges pa rim par byon nas bstan 'gro'i don mdzad pa rnams ni gtso bor sa gter gyi byon tshul la / yang zab mo dag snang dang dgongs pa'i gter gyi 'byung tshul ni / de'ang byan chub sems dpa'rnams

’byung ba’i sgra dang ri dwags lta bu las kyang **[f. 6b]** chos kyi sgra rgyun mi ’chad pa gsan cing sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa’ rnams kyis kyang zhal bstan zhing chos gsungs bar bshad do / bsod nams thams cad bsdud pa ting nge ’dzin gyi mdo las / dri ma med pa’i gzi brjid chos ’dod pa’i byang chub sems dpa’ sems dpa’ chen po bsam gyi [= gyis] mi khyab pa phun sum tshogs pa gus pa dang bcas pa rnams ni ’jig rten gyi khams gzhan dag du ’dug kyang sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das kyi zhal ston par mdzad cing chos kyang thos par mdzad do / zhes gsungs shing khyad par du ’phags chen rnams kyi gzigs ngor dag pa’i snang ba ’ba’ zhig las ma dag pa’i snang ba ma ’chis pas dus gsum rtag pa rgyun gyi ’khor lo rtsa gsum lhag pa’i lha rab ’byams dag dang / chos kyi sgro ba rmad du byung ba du ma rgyun chags su mdzad pa las / zab mo gdams pa mtha’ yas ’byung ba dag skal ba dang ldan pa **[f. 7a]** rnams la spel bar ’os pa’i gang zag so so’i mos blo ’tsham pa’i dag snang gi chos sde ji snyed pa kun gyi spyod yul du snang bar mdzad pa ’phags yul gyi paṇ grub du ma dang / bod yul gyi gsar snying ris med dge ba’i bshes gnyen dang gter ston grub thob rnams kyi rnam thar las byung ba ltar dang / de ltar dgongs gter du grags pa rnams kyang / mdo las ’jam dpal ’byung ba bzhi nas nam mkha’i gter nas ’byung gi / de bzhin du chos thams cad rgyal ba’i thugs gter las ’byung bas gter gyi don la longs spyod par shes par byos shig / ces kyi smon lam gyi khyad par / lus can rnams kyis bya dang ni / shing dang ‘od zer thams cad dang / nam mkha’ las kyang chos kyi sgra/ rgyun mi ’chad par thos par shog / ces pa lta bu’i smon lam gyi mthu btsan pa dang / de dag la chos kyis ’phongs pa’i rgyu med pa’i phyir ’byung ba’i sgra dang ri dwags lta bu las kyang chos kyi sgra rgyun mi ’chad par gsan cing / sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa’ rnams kyis kyang zhal bstan cing chos gsungs bar bshad de / bsod nams thams cad sdud pa ting nge ’dzin gyi mdo las / dri ma med pa’i gzi brjid / chos ’dod pa’i byang chub sems dpa’ chen po bsam pa phun sum tshogs pa gus pa dang bcas pa rnams ni / ’jig rten gyi khams gzhan du ’dug kyang sangs rgyas bcom ldan ’das kyis zhal ston par mdzad cing chos kyang thos par mdzad do / zhes gsungs shing / khyad par du ’phags chen rnams kyi gzigs ngor dag pa’i snang ba ’ba’ zhig las ma dag pa’i snang ba ma ’chis pas / dus gsum rtag pa rgyun gyi ’khor lor rtsa gsum lhag pa’i lha rab ’byams dag dang chos kyi sgro ba rmad du byung ba du ma rgyun chags su mdzad pa las zab mo’i gdams pa mtha’ yas pa byung ba dag / skal ba dang ldan pa rnams la spel bar ’os pa rnams gang zag so so’i mos blor ’tshams pa’i dag snang gi chos sde ji snyed pa kun gyi spyod yul du snang bar mdzad pa ’phags yul gyi paṇ grub du ma dang / bod yul gyi gsar snying ris med dge ba’i bshes gnyen dang gter ston grub thob rnams kyi rnam thar las byung ba ltar

gsungs pa dang / rjes su mthun pa ’phags pa’i gang zag rnams la dgongs pa’i klong nas chos kyi gter kha brdol du yong ba gsungs sde / chos yang dag pa bsdud pa’i mdo las / byang chub sems dpa’ **[f. 7b]** sems dpa’ dag pa nas rang gi yid kyi ’dod pa nyid las gdam ngag rjes su ston pa thams cad ’byung ngo / zhes dang / gzhan yang mdo las / don la nges pa’i gdengs [= gding] rnyed na / sems las chos gter ’bum phrag brdol / zhes sogs gsungs pa bzhin / ’phags bal bod ljongs kun tu mkhas grub chen po rnams kyi zab mo dgongs pa’i gdam zab mtha’ yas pa zhig da lta’i bar du ’byung bzhin pa dang / mdor na chos nor dam rdzas la sogs pa’i sgo ’phar ci dgar ’gyed [=’byed] cing grol ba bzhi ldan gyi ’phrin las rmad du byung bas dus ngan gyi mtha’ la dam pa’i chos ’dzin zhing ’dul mdo’i bstan pa mi bzhugs pa’i gnas su gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa’i bstan pa khol bur khol bur mi nub dar zhing rgyas sde ’gro ba ’dul dka’ ba mtha’ dag sgrol ba’i ’phrin las rgya che zhing rgyun chags pa nyid de gu ru’i gsungs las / snyigs **[f. 8a]** ma’i dus su bstan mtha’ gter gyis skyongs / zhes ji srid rnam ’dren lnga pa’i bstan pa ma shar gyi bar du zab mo gter gyi phrin las nam yang mi nub par gsungs so /

dang / de bzhin du dgongs gter du grags pa rnams kyang mdo las / ’jam dpal ’byung ba bzhi ni nam mkha’i gter nas ’byung gi / de bzhin du chos thams cad rgyal pa’i thugs gter las ’byung bas gter gyi don la longs spyod pa shes par byos shig / ces gsungs pa dang rjes su mthun par ’phags pa’i gang zag rnams la dgongs pa’i klong nas chos kyi gter kha brdol du yod par gsungs te / chos yang dag par sdud pa’i mdo las / byang chub sems dpa’ bsam pa dag pa ni rang gi yid kyi ’dod pa nyid las gdams ngag rjes su bstan pa thams cad ’byung ngo / zhes dang / gzhan yang mdo las / don la nges pa’i gting rnyed na / sems las chos gter ’bum phrag brdol / zhes sogs gsungs pa bzhin ’phags bal bod ljongs kun tu mkhas grub chen po rnams kyi zab mo dgongs pa’i gdams zab mtha’ yas pa zhig da lta’i bar du ’byung bzhin pa dang / mdor na chos nor dam rdzas la sogs pa’i sgo ’phar ci dgar ’byed cing grol ba bzhi ldan gyi phrin las rmad du byung bas dus ngan gyi tha mar dam pa’i chos ’dzin cing ’dul mdo’i bstan pa mi bzhugs pa’i gnas su gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa’i bstan pa khol bu khol bur mi nub dar zhing rgyas te ’gro ba gdul dka’ ba mtha’ dag sgrol ba’i phrin las rgya che zhing rgyun chags pa nyid de/ gu ru’i gsungs las/ snyigs ma’i dus su bstan mtha’ gter gyis skyongs % zhes ji srid rnam ’dren lnga pa’i bstan pa ma shar gyi bar du zab mo gter gyi phrin las nam yang mi [p. 419] nub par gsungs so/

de'ang sems can spyi mthun gyi las dang sngon smon gyi khyad par che ba'i sngon rgya gar 'phags pa'i yul na mkhas grub bgrangs las 'das pa 'tsho zhing bzhugs pa'i skabs der smon lam gyi khyad par dang sems can gyi bsod nams la rag las pas/

rig 'dzin grub mchog mang pos mu stegs pa la brtsod par 'byung bar gyur te mu stegs pa'i rgol ba 'joms pa ma gyur pham la nye bas sngon smon gyi khyad par ltag par dus la bab tshe/

slob dpon chen po thogs med kyis thogs pa med pa'i ting nge 'dzin kyi rtsal bstan te mu stegs kyi slob dpon bzhi 'khor lnga brgya dang bcas pa tshar bcad nas mdzad chos **[f. 8b]** bsam gyi [= gyis] mi khyab pa bsdu bar mdzad do/

de nas phyis rgya gar gyi yul phyogs kun dang rdo rje gdan du mu stegs kyi sprul pa sgyu ma mkhan tshad bzung bral ba'i rje blon 'ga' 'byung ba'i skabs der/

gsang sngags kyi rnal 'byor brnyes pa kun gyi dam par 'dzin pa'i rgyal po nyi ma seng ge la mu stegs dang ha shwang gi lta ba brtsod pa'i skabs der/

rgyal po pham du nye ba la gsang sngags kyi grub mchog rdzu sphrul ya ma zung gi rig 'dzin chen po padma sam bha [wa] la gsol ba btab pas/

nyid kyi sku pa'i sprul bsgyur du ma dang khyad par nam mkha'i snying po la bzhengs ste rdzu 'phrul gyi slob dpon du mas rdo rje gdan gyi mu stegs pa'i rgol ba tshar bcad par mdzad de chos rgyal de nyid gyi thugs dgongs yongs su rdzogs par 'grub par mdzad pa'i rnam thar mang du yod kyang 'dir bsdus/

bstan pa gnyis pa dbus 'gyur lung bstan mdo las 'byung ba ltar/

**[f. 9a]** bod yul kyi dbus su rgyal rabs lnga nas gsang sngags kyi bstan pa 'byung ba mkha' 'gro'i lung bstan bzhing du byang chub sems dpa' 'phags pa spyan ras gzigs kyi sprul pa du ma las 'phags pa'i chos rgyal chen po srong btsan sgam pos dam pa chos kyi dbu brnyes pa'i 'phrin las la thabs sna tshogs kyi bzhengs te ma rung ba rnams 'dul bar byed pa'i skabs de yang/

lhan cig skyes pa'i bon gyi slon po rta ra glu dbang khra gdong song gyi gyung drung ston pa'i bka' bzhin rjes su 'dzin pa'i bka' 'bangs du mas bod kyi rgyal blon phyi nang gi 'thab gzhi dang khyad par du nang pa'i bstan pa la rgol ba 'byin nas bsnubs la nye ba'i skabs der 'jam dpal khri srong sde'u btsan gyi gong ma'i rnam thar yig tshang la gzigs te/

sngon smon lam dus la bab bsod nams kyi mthu smin pa'i skabs der rgya gar gyi slob dpon chen po grub pa'i rig 'dzin **[f. 9b]** padma sam bha wa bod yul du 'dren pa'i [= pas] gser dang bang chen thengs gsum btang ste spyan 'dren tshul gyi bang mi rnams slebs ma sleb sngon

smon lam gyi mthus sprul pa'i rig 'dzin chen po padma sam bha wa de nyid dgongs pa'i ye shes kyi mkhyen te bal bod kyi mtshams su mjal ba dang gser dang rgyal po'i dgongs tshul snyan du phul bas sprul pa'i sku yis/

nga yi snang ba thams cad gser la grub pas ger gyi rang la mkho gal mi 'dug gsungs te phyogs bcur gtor nas bal bod kyi lha srin sa bdag thams cad brngan par mdzad te tsa'a mi rnams sngon du btang zhing bod yul du spyan drangs/

rgyal pos gzhong pa'i lha chu nas mjal ste rgyal po la nga che gsungs pa'i mgur mang po gsungs pas rgyal po shin tu thugs sangs dgyes te pho brang du spyan drangs nas mchod pas snyan bskul/

bod yul bon gyi gsol ba'i lha srins sde brgyad thams chad bran du bkol zhing **[f. 10a]** ma rung ba thams cad dam la btags/

de nas bod yul lha mi 'gro ba yongs la grol ba bzhi ldan gyi gdam pa mang po spel gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa'i khyad chos lam zab sngon srid na med pa'i rgyab chos dangbcas pas yongs su smin par mdzad de rten dang brten par bcas pa mtha' rgyas pa'i phrin las rab 'byams kyi sgo phyogs mthar rgyas pa dang/

rgyal po'i thugs dgongs yongs su bzhed pa bskang nas/
lung las/
da ni bod kyi sku dngos 'dul bya rdzogs/
lho nub srin po thams cad kha lud nas/
'dzam bu gling 'di za bar byed pa la/
srin po 'dul phyir lho nub gshegs pa yin ces dang/
khyad par bod yul mtha' dbus ma lus pa/
smin zhing grol dang bstan pa rgyas na yang/
sngon gyi smon lam dbang dang mthu che bas/
rje yi gdung rabs gsum nas rgyal po zhig/
dar ma'i ming can dang ni klu dpal sogs/
**[f. 10b]** smon lam log pa'i rje blon 'ga' 'byung nas/
bod kyi bstan pa brlag cing bshigs par 'gyur/
de la da lta rje 'bangs mthu ldan pa/
gnub ban [= chen] dpal rdor gnyis kyi 'dul bya zhing/
smon lam che 'grub dar cig bstan pa 'phel/
zhes dang/

mdor na bod kha ba can du chos rgyal mes dbon rnams kyi bzhed pa rnam thar mtha' yas pa brjod pa bgrangs kyi mi long ba dang/

sprul pa'i rig 'dzin chen po padma sam bha was mdzad pa'i 'phrin las dang ngo mtshar rmad du byung ba'i rnam thar las thol bur btus te snga 'gyur bal bod rgya hor 'jang mon sog li la sogs pa 'dzam gling yul chen kun tu dam pa chos kyi bstan pa btsugs/

mdo sngags kyi chos kun dar zhing rgyas par mdzad de rjes su 'dzin pa'i rig 'dzin grub thob ya ma zung gi rnal 'byor la brnyes pa'i rgyud pa bsam gyi [= gyis] mi khyab pa dang/

khyad par can gyi rnam thar la yid rang te rjes su 'dzin pa'i gsar rnying bka' gter **[f. 11a]** kun gyi rnal 'byor ba dbang rab dam pa rnams ni rdo rje theg pa [= pa'i] gsang sngags zab mo nyams su blang ba'i drod rtags mngon sum mthong ba khyad par can dang/

gzhan yang rjes 'jug gi slob ma yang rab kyi spyod pa la brten nas/

ri yi bu byas na bun gyi gos skyon bsam gtan gyi zas la spyod cing chos brgyad las blo 'das pa sha stag byung na'ang/

phyin bod yul mtha' dbus kun tu chos tshul gyi ming rag pa bka' zab dang gtam ngag gyi rgyud pa chal 'chol du song nas nang bstan gyi dam pa rnams kyang rang che'i phyogs su gol zhing rgyal bstan khyad par gud pa'i skabs 'di lta bu lags na/

phyi rabs kyi bstan pa dang gang zag rang rang sems can thams cad mgu par byed pa'i spyod pa la 'jug nas sdom pa gsum la rkyon kyis ma gos pa byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug nas myur lam rdzogs pa chen **[f. 11b]** po'i brtul zhugs spyod pa dgongs pa rnams kyi sngon byon grub rje gong ma'i rnam thar la yid rang theg pa gsum gyi lam la bskyod te bstan pa dang sems can gyi don du zhum pa med pa'i bka' spyad [= dka' spyad] dang 'bad rtsol gyi bya ba kyad par can la brtson pa gal che ba dang gsang sngags kyi sgor zhugs/

nus mthu gyi rtsal sten rig pa rang sor chud tshe gcig lus gcig la zung 'jug rdo rje 'chang gi go 'phang la re ba rnams kyis blo bla ma la dri grogs yi dam la brten gros mkha' 'gro chos skyong rnams la gtad nas blo bkal gcig chog gi sgo nas sngar gyi rig 'dzin chen po don gnyis mthar phyin gyi bdag po ye shes mtsho rgyal sangs rgyas ye shes dpal gyi rdo rje sogs lta bu'i rlung sems la dbang thob snang srid sems su chud pa'i grub pa brnyes pa ni rang rgyud la rtsal thon pa cig byas la byung ba yin la/

de yang sngon glang dar gyi [= gyis] gnubs kyi rig 'dzin chen **[f. 12a]** po la rtsal 'gran zhing khyod la nus pa lhag par ci yod zhes zhus pas/

gnubs kyi[s] ngas sngags bzlas pa tsam kyis nus pa ’di la gzigs shig ces gdengs ’dzub [= sdigs mdzub] gnam la phyar pas/

gdengs mdzub [= sdigs mdzub] kyi steng du lcags kyi sdig pa nag po g.yag tsam dgu brtsegs pa mthong bas/

rgyal po skrag nas dkon mchog sngags pa’i sku la ngas mi bdo’o chos mdzod cig ces zer/

yang nus pa ’di la gzigs shig gsungs nas gdengs mdzub [= sdigs mdzub] kyi steng dang pha bong ri rab tsam btegs te pha ris brag la bsnun pas tshal par gtor ba mthong rgyal po shin tu ’jigs shing khyed ’khor dang bcas pa la ngas gnod mi byed chos mdzod cig zer ba ltar phyi rabs gsang sngags kyi sgor zhugs nas sgrub pa byed pa’i gang zag phal mo che su dang sus kyang de lta bu’i lung rtogs dang nus mthu la brtson pa las/

**[f. 12b]** gang byung tho co su smra ba la spyad na dbyings ye shes kyi [mkha’ ’gro’i] bka’ chad dang ’jig rten gyi rnyog sgra [= gra/dra] sgrogs pas shin tu zab cing gsang ba’i lam la zhugs pa gal che’o/

khyad par u rgyan chen pos/

nyon mongs bod yul dbus su long/

’tsho ba’i zas rnams ’bangs kyi khral zhes dang/

’on kyang mkhas pa mi bzhi gtug slob dpon dpal gyi seng ge dang/

rgya gar khrag ’thung nag po dang/

phung byed shin tam garbha dang/

bal po bha su rta ra [= bha su dha ra] bzhi/

mkhas pa bzhi yi thugs gtor te/

zab pa’i man ngag thugs la btags/

zhes pa ni/

ma ’ongs pa’i ’jig rten snod bcud rnams spyi dang skye ’gro yongs kyi bya spyod log ste rnal ’byor pa gsang sngags sgrub pa po rnams la dgra thal long du ’byung ba’i dus zhig la gal po che sgrub pa’i brda rtags yin la/

kun kyi rang nyams chud pa gal che’o/

de yang bod yul gyi rnal ’byor pa chen po grub mchog **[f. 13a]** mi la ras pa’i nus mthu tar na dka’ spyad dang brtson ’khrus kyi mchog gi bla ma la blo bkal/

sgrub pa’i yi dam la mthil bzung/

bstan pa’i srung ma la rgyab sngas nas tshe gcig lus gcig la phyir mi ldog pa thar pa dang thams cad mkhyen pa’i go ’phang la brnyes pa ni khams gsum gyi ’jig rten la gnas pa dang/

’gro ba kun gyi don sgrub pa mthar phyin pa lta bu’i nus mthu la brtson pa ni ya rab kyi spyod pa dang mdzad pa’i phrin las rnams mthar phyin pa ltar dang/

khyad par rā lo tsā ba chen pos/

sras dar ma mdo sde gtsos sa thob kyi sems dpa’ bcu gsum bsgrung shi dmyal bar mi ’gro gdeng zhig yod gsung bzhin/

sngags gos dkar can gyi rjes ’jug phyi rabs sgrub pa byed pa’i gang zag su dang su yin kyang/

grub rje gong ma rnams **[f. 13b]** kyi rnam thar la bstun nas rang rgyud ngang gi dul zhing/

nang rtags phyi ru mngon pa’i drod rtags dang spyod pa de bzhin mthun par gang gi kyang ma gos pa’i rang nas khyer so gsum gyi gdeng dang ldan pa/

dus rtags du ma nyams pa rang rgyud nyams su len cing ’jig rten kyi chos brgyad blos ldog nas nges ’byung dang skyo shas tshad med pa dang du len nas tshe gcig lus gcig la blo yid theng [= thengs] mang btang nas grub pa’i nyams rtogs dang rtsa rlung gi bde drod la brten zhing ras dkar lcang lo can gyi sde la zhugs pa las/

phyi tshul nang stong bya spyod log ste gang byung ji mos kyi tho yol [= co] du song na ’di phyi kun tu lhag pa’i yon tan thams cad nyams ste mthar ’dre can dang nye tshe ru ltung ba gdon mi za ba mdo rgyud thun mong gi brgyud lung kun nas ’byung ba gong ma rnams kyi gsung dang dgongs pa la kun gyi bstun nas **[f. 14a]** rab tu gces par ’dzin na mthar thug zung ’jug rdo rje ’chang gi sa lam la nye bar rdzogs pa’i don rlabs po che la ’bad dgos pa yin no/

ces pa’ang nye rgyud gsang sngags rnying ma ba’i grub rje gong ma rnams kyi gsung dpe dang ’phags yul gyi deng rabs can grub mchog du mas [= du ma’i] snga ’gyur bstan pa’i srol ’dzin gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa’i rnal ’byor la brnyes pa’i rig ’dzin grub thob gter ston bod yul gyi skyes mchog gang zag bal po che rnams kyi rnam thar dang/

grub mchog padma sam bha wa’i zab mo gter gyi lo rgyus lung las ’byung tshul sogs nas btus te phyogs med kyi ral thog brlom (?) pa pra bha swa ra badzras lcags rta lo rgyal zla’i yar tshe bzang por sgrub gnas ’od gsal mkha’ spyod gling du yi ge pa chos dpal skyes rabs u rgyan ming a smras rim bzhin bris pa mang ga lam//

## Text 4: *rta mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char gyi rtsol med gsang sngags myur lam*

**[f 1a]** rta mgrin yang gsang rdo rje me char gyi rtsol med gsang sngags myur lam /

**[f. 1b]** rta mgrin gsang ba'i yang tig yang gsang rdo rje'i me char rtsol med gsang ba sngags kyi rnal 'byor pa rang rgyud ngang gi dul ba kun gyi lta gdengs khyer so gsum gyi brgyud pa la nyams tshul bzhin spyod pa rnams kyis snga 'gyur bstan pa'i srol 'dzin dbang bcu'i yon tan sku la rdzogs pa'i che rtags dgyes par bzhe srol ltar na

de la 'di'ang dgos don bsam gyis mi khyab pa gsungs phyir/

**[f. 2a]** mdor na o rgyan chen po'i zhal snga nas/

bod yul mun pa'i smag rum du/

mi las lhag gyur ya mtshan che/

spyod pa rmad byung ngo mtshar che/

mthu dang rdzu 'phrul stobs po che/

zhes gsung pa ltar/

rnal 'byor yang rab dbang bcu'i che rtags sku la rdzogs/

rlung sems rang dbang thob/

snang srid lha skur 'char/

rags pa'i skhrul pa ldog/

ka dag gzhi'i thog la phebs pa zhig la'o/

**[f. 2b]** de ltar ma yin gang shar rang mos blo yis bcos mas 'dzin zhing sgrub pa rnams la rgyal thob/

zhes gsungs pa ltar/

phyi so thar nang byang sems gsang ba rdo rje theg pa'i gdeng bzhi rdzogs pa'i rnal 'byor dbang rab dam pa rnams kyi che rtags sku la rdzogs pa'i mnga' gsol rgyan gyi lta gon la/

thog mar rdo rje slob dpon mthar nyid bzhi dang ldan pa'i drung du/

slob bu rnams kyi kun spyod sgo gsum rnam par dag pa'i maṇḍala phul la/

gsol ba gdab pa ni/

kye kye ho/

rdo rje slob dpon sangs rgyas dpal/

'gro ba'i mgon khyed che ba'i mchog/

bdag la gsan cing dgongs su gsol/

bde gshegs kun gyi gsungs pa bzhin/

so thar byang sems gsang sngags kyi/

bka' bzhin bdag gis yongs su bzungs/

dam tshig ma lus [rtag] du srung/
lus dang srog la ltos med bgyis/
**[f. 3a]** gnang pa chen pos bdag nyid la/
dngos grub skal pa rtsal du gsol/
zhes lan gsum gyi srung sdom khas blangs shing rgyud pa'o/
slob dpon khro bo'i rgyal po mthing nag rdo rje'i rta skad 'tsher ba gcig gsal ba'i thugs ka nas ya/
las lcags kyi sdig pa nag po mgo dgu pa ye shes kyi me 'bar ba zhig 'phros/
slob bu rnams kyi lus la phog pas sdig sgrib thams cad lhag med ru bsregs shing song bar mos la/
slob dpon gyi me sdong sbar la/
ōm badzra yaksha kre dhā sarba sā sam dzwa la rōm/
zhes brjod la me thun brab/
de nas slob dpon gyis/
rdo rje 'dzin pa khyed rang rnams kyi lus rnam snang gi phyag gyur bzhugs/
sems [kyi] rig rtsal gzhan du ma yengs bar gzhi thog la skyong/
**[f. 3b]** ōm shu nya ta dznyā na badzra swa bha wā arma konya hōm/
stong pa nyid du gyur/
stong pa'i ngang las slob bu rnams skad cig gis bcom ldan 'das dpal rdo rje sems dpa' sku mdog dkar po zhal gcig phyag gnyis rdo rje dang dril bu 'dzin pa'i longs spyod rdzogs sku padma dang zla ba'i gdan la sems dpa'i skyil krung gi bzhugs pa'i spyod bor ōm dkar po mgrin par ā: dmar po thugs kar hūm sngon pos mtshan par gyur/
gnas gsum la bdudis bdud rtsi thig le byug/
phyogs bcu'i bde bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi sku gsung thugs kyi rdo rje yig 'bru gsum spyan drangs te thim par gyur/
ōm ā: hūm/
zhes gsal btab/
hūm/
byin rlabs ye shes rdo rje'i sku/
nam mkha' lta bu'i rgya che ba/
mi 'gyur sku gsum thugs rdo rje'i/
sems dpa' gsum du byin gyis rlabs/

**[f. 4a]** slob dpon gyis rdo rje rtse gcig pas gnas gsum la reg cing/

hūm/

snang srid ye nas ka dag la ’od gsal bde gshegs snying po’i gzhi/

ma bcos lhun grub phyag rgya che/

sku gsung thugs kyi rol pa las/

bsam gyis mi khyab pa’i rgyu ’phrul ’gyed/

dngos grub rgya mtsho’i phrin las kun/

lhun grub ye shes dpal ’bar ba/

skal ldan bu la dengs ’dir rtsal/

sa ma ya dhi hūm/

de nas slob dpon gyis sgrub pa’i dam tshig dang ’brel te bshad pa sngon du song nas dngos gzhi srung bya khyad par dang du len pa la/

skal ldan khyed rnams tshul bzhin du/

gsang sngags gsang ba’i dam tshig dang/

sgrub pa’i lung la gzhi brten nas/

sku gsung thugs kyi dam tshig rnams/

**[f. 4b]** srog gi phyir yang la btang zhig/

gal te rgyud ’gyur ’das gyur na/

rdo rje srin po [= pos] snying bsregs shing/

thar pa’i srog rtsa chad par ’gyur/

de phyir sgrub pa’i dam tshig kun/

yang dag don du srung bar gyis/

dngos grub thams cad thob par ’gyur/

sa ma ya i dam na ra kan/

zhes khro bo yaksha me dbal rten gyi dpang por bskyed/

sa ma ya ’bum gyi rtsa ba sku gsung thugs kyi dam tshig la brten te bsdus pa’i bdud tsis/

sa ma ya ha na ha nas gdams/

rdo rje spyi bor bzhag dam tsig brten par bya/

de nas rgyan gyi mnga’ gsol dang dbang bskur ba ni/

thabs kyi spyod pa’i ’gro don du/

byams dang snying rje’i gang ’dul ba/

sangs rgyas phris las sgrub mdzad cing/

’gro rnams ma lus sgrol bar bya/

zhes gsungs pa ltar/

**[f. 5a]** sngon ’byung grub pa’i rig ’dzin rnams kyi rjes su snyegs par ’dod pa’i rnal ’byor gang zhig gsang ba bsngags kyi lam du zhugs pa ji ltar ’dzin pa kun spyod dang mthun zhing/

smon ’jug byang chub sems mchog gzhi skyong/

bde sdug bdang len byams snying rje’i thabs shesya ma bral ba brta po’i ngang nas

gsang ba bsngags kyi rjes su bzung ba ma rtogs [= gtogs] ji byung ga shar ’os [=’ol] tshod byed pa mi rung ngo/

dang po zhu ba/

kye [kye] ho/

bla ma kun bzang rdo rje ’chang/

rigs kun ’dus pa rgyal ba’i sras/

bdag la gsan cing brtse bas dgongs rdo rje theg pa’i sgor zhugs nas/

bka’ la me ’da’ dam bca’ bzung/

sgo gsum smin par mdzad du gsol/

zhu lan/

snying rje’i dbang phyug sems dpa’ che/

rdo rje ’dzin mchog bla ma rje/

**[f. 5b]** thabs dang shes rab tshul brtan pos/

mched dang lcam dral pho nya bcas/

theg chen chos ni rnams dag cing/

ye nas dag cing rnyog pa med/

drag shul thabs kyi ’gro ’dul phyir/

sras kyi dam pa dgongs par gyur/

zhes dbugs dbyung pa’o/

de nas rgyan rnams rim gyi btegs la/

kye kye/

rig pa ’dzin pa’i skyes bu chen po yis/

grol lugs chen po bzhi yi gdengs ldan gyis/

brtul zhugs grub pa’i nyams kyi stang stabs dang/

gar dgu’i brjed nyams [= brjid nyams] ldan pa che ba’i mchog/

ma bcos gnyug ma’i gos dkar lcang lo’i sde’i/

rlung sems rang dbang thob pa'i rnal 'byor pas/
dbu skra ral pa thod du bcing pa ni/
rig 'dzin grub mchog gsang sngags brnyes pa'i brda/
**[f. 6a]** sku yi brjid du ras dkar gsol ba ni/
rtsa rlung thig le'i bde drod 'bar ba'i brda/
rin chen dung gi snyan cha brgyan pa ni/
thabs shes gnyis kyi chos 'khor bskor ba'i brda/
rus pa'i rgyan drug drwa bas spras pa ni/
mkha' 'gro 'bum gyi tshong dpon chas pa'i brda/
'gul [= mgul] pa gser gyi rdo rje rgya gram ni/
phrin las rnam bzhi'i che chos 'chad pa'i brda/
thugs kar gsal ba'i me long gdan pa ni/
'khor 'da' thams cad sa ler mkhyen pa'i brda/
raksha nag pos do shal 'chang ba ni/
drag sngags nus pa'i me lce 'bar ba'i brda/
'ja' thig sna lnga'i sgol che gsol ba ni/
mkha' la g.yo med bsam gtan bskyil ba'i brda/
rdo rje rtse dgu nam mkhar gdengs pa ni/
**[f. 6b]** theg dge'i rnal 'byor pa nyams la 'char ba'i brda/
lcags sam drag po'i phur pa'i bsgril ba ni/
bstan dgra dam sri'i snying bsregs gzhoms pa'i brda/
dbu yi rgyan du krog [= brog] zhu sgron pa ni/
snang srid thams cad dbang du 'du ba'i brda/
mthing nag dar gyi ber chen lhub pa ni/
che ba'i lha rnams bran du bskol ba'i brda/
'ur thig khra bos sgyogs rdo 'byin pa ni/
nag phyogs 'byung po rdul du brlag pa'i brda/
thabs shes mda' gzhu g.yas g.yon bskor ba ni/
dkar phyogs dgra lha'i dpung grogs 'tsho ba'i brda/
zhabs kyi srin lham [= lhams] nya mgo gsol ba ni/
srid pa'i lha 'dres spyi bor mchod pa'i brda/
ces brjod/

rgyan rnams bskor [= bskon] la/

**[f. 7a]** dam lhan skal ldan skyes bu rdo rje ’dzin/
mched dang lcam dral dam ldan pho nya bcas/
rtsa rlung thig le dag pa’i ’khor lo ru/
rdo rje’i go cha’i lha rnams mnga’ gsol bstod/
’gyur med rdo rje’i sku yi ’khor lo ru/
rtsa brgyud bla ma’i byin rlabs sprin phung ’khrigs/
’gags med tshang dbyangs gsung gi ’khor lo ru/
yan lag drug bcu gsung dbyangs char ltar ’bebs/
gsal stong zung ’jug thugs kyi ’khor lo ru/
’od gsal sgrib med ka dag gzhi thog chud/
’jigs med rdul bras chos sku’i dbang thob cing/
gzugs sku dam pa rnam gnyis mngon ’gyur shog/

zhes smon lam btab/

grub pa’i rig ’dzin dbang chen thugs kyi sras/
**[f. 7b]** dri med chos kun ’od gsal ’dus ma byas/
gzhan don lhun grub rgyal ba’i rgyal sar phyin/
stobs bcu’i dbang thob rgyal ’bang mda’ ’og bsgyur/
rgyal srid dpal thob don gnyis lhun ’grub cing/
phyogs las rnam rgyal phrin las mthar phyin gyur/

zhes rgyal srid dbang thob/

smon lam gdab pa ni/

thabs mchog bde ba chen po’i dkyil ’khor du/
shes rab stong nyid gar gyi ’khor ’das khyab/
zung ’jug rdo rje ’chang gi go ’phang mchog/
tshe ’di nyid la ’grub par byin gyis rlabs/

de nas rtags brgyad thogs la/

bde chen rdo rje nam mkha’i rnal ’byor brnyes/
chos dbyings ’gyur med ’od gsal mtha’ dbus bral/
rgyal tshab dbang thob bkra shis dpal gyi phyug/
bde legs kun ’byung phun tshogs bkra shis rdzas/

**[f. 8a]** rnam ’dren bzhi pa lha klu yis mchod bzhin/
gdung dang rgyal mtshan gser nya padma dang/
dung dkar bum pa dpal be’u gser ’khor lo/
bstan pa’i rgyal tshab mchog la mnga’ gsol ’bul/
bstan dang ’gro ba yongs kyi dpal mgon du/
sa gsum bkra shis snang bas khyab gyur cig/
ces brjod la bkra shis pa’i rdzas rnams bskor smon lam gdab pa ni/
hūm/
rang byung ye shes ’od lnga yi/
srid pa’i snang ba yongs grol nas/
bde chen zhi ba dbyings kyi ngang/
rdo rje sems ’grub bkra shis shog/
ces brjod la bkra shis dang smon lam rgyas par bya’o/
sa ma ya /
[...][774]
spros med rnal ’byor yang rab gyis/
shin tu dben pa’i nags khrod du/
rgyu shan dbye ’gyed bsam gtan bsgom/
**[f. 8b]** khyer so gsum gyi drod rtags gyis/
gdengs bzhi ldan pa’i rgyal sa zungs/
rtsal bcu’i dbang thob che rtags mngon/
zhum pa med pa’i bka’ spyad [= dka’ spyad] ’bad/
bde zhing yangs pa’i mkha’ la spyod/
gzhan don grol bar gzugs sku brnyes/
mthar thug don gnyis lhun ’grub nas/
sa bcu lam lnga rim bgrod de/
’og min gnas nas phyir mi ldog/
’di ltar bu yis nyams len bgyis/
snying gtam yin no bod ’bangs rje/
the tshom ma byed phyi rabs rnams/

[774] *ḍākniī* script.

nyams su blangs bas dngos ’grub thob/

i thi/

gu hya rgya/

zab gsang rgya/

kha tham rgya/

’di ltar gsang ba’i yang tig ’di/

skal ldan ma gtog ’phrad mi srid/

’phrad kyang blo yis chud par dka’/

gnad rnams shin tu zab gsang ’di/

gang ’phrad dngos grub sna re thob/

tshig zung don bsdus man ngag ’di/

bden ’byung yang gsang srog khrid yin/

**[f. 9a]** da lta chos rgyal khyod la gdams/

ma ’ongs snyigs ma sdug bsngal dus/

bstan ’gro skyobs pa’i gnyen po ru/

phan phyir thugs kyi klong du sbos/

’dab chags lo pa rdo rje’i ming/

de yis chos skal nyid du mdzod/

i thi/

sa ma ya rgya rgya rgya/

# Appendix Three

## *A Preliminary List of gTer chen bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's Revealed Cycles*

The following is a tentative list of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje revealed texts collected in nine volumes. The titles reported here refer to the ones appearing on the *recto* of the first page of the texts. Some of them are provided with a title page title. Others do not have a title page title. In that case, I have reported portion of the first line of the text or the subject title appearing in the margin. The numbers between brackets after each title refer to the total number of pages of each text. The texts included in this list are updated until summer 1999, other treasures as revealed until today are not included in the present list simply because not collected in volumes yet.

VOLUME I:

The First group of texts in this volume is called *chos* and is centred on 'Od dpag med (Amitābha Buddha) and contains a total of four texts:

1. *Yang gsang sgrub skor snang ba mtha' yas kyi mngon rtog padma' i snying po byang chub lam bzang/* (15)
2. *rNam dag bde ba can gyi gsol 'debs thugs rje'i lcags kyu/* (4)
3. *Yang gsang sgrub skor snang ba mtha' yas kyi tshogs mchod padma'i rol mtsho/* (7)
4. *Yang gsang sgrub skor snang ba mtha' yas kyi sgo nas byang bsreg bde chen lam bzang/* (10)

The Second group of texts is called *longs* and is centred on 'Phags pa sbyan ras gzigs (Avalokiteśvara), and contains a total of nine texts:

5. *Yang gsang sgrub skor phags pa spyan ras gzigs kyi sgrub thabs 'gro drug mun sel thar pa'i shin rta/* (20)
6. *Sems dpa' brgyad kyi snying po/* (1)
7. *Yang gsang sgrub skor 'gro 'dul 'khor dong sprugs kyi rgyud 'debs byin rlabs sprin phung/* (3)
8. *sByan ras gzigs 'gro 'dul 'khor ba dong sprugs kyi sgo nas nyams chags bskang ba'i tshogs mchod padma'i rol mtsho/* (12)
9. *Yang gsang sgrub skor 'phags pa thugs rje chen po spyan ras gzigs 'da' ka bde chen myur lam/* (4)
10. *Yang gsang sgrub skor spyan ras gzigs 'khor ba dong sprugs kyi byang bsregs 'krul snang rang grol/* (12)
11. *'Phags pa sbyan ras gzigs kyi mon lam bden 'grub 'og min them skal/* (10)
12. *Yang gsang sgrub skor spyan ras gzigs 'grol 'dul 'khor ba dong sprugs kyi spyi skrus nyams chags kun sbyong zla ba'i bdud rtsi bzhugs* (18)

13. *Yang gsang sgrub skor 'gro 'dul thugs rje chen po 'khor ba dong sprugs kyi dbang chog ye shes byin char grol ba drug ldan thar ba'i shing rta bzhugs* (12)

The Third set of texts from the first volume, *sprul*, is mainly centred upon Guru Rinpoche, and contains a total of twenty texts:

14. *bLa sgrub gsang ba kun 'das las/ gu ru bde ba chen po yi/ gsang sgrub nor bu'i rgya can gyi/ nye lam zab mo'i rnal 'byor/* (10)
15. *sKu gsung nying thig gsol 'debs byin rlabs gzi 'bar/* (4)
16. *Gu ru bde ba chen po'i nye lam dbang gzhi'i dong bsdus nor bu'i rgya can/* (12)
17. *sKu gsum bla ma'i sgrub skor las/ bla ma bde ba chen po yi/ nye lam gsang ba zab mo'i chos/ dbang mchog yid bzhin nor bu/* (10)
18. *Gu ru bde ba chen po las/ tshogs mchod padma'i drab a/* (5)
19. *bLa ma kun 'dus yang snying/* (2)
20. *sLob dpon dga' rab rdo rje yi/ bla sgrub ye shes dngos ster/* (2)
21. *Gu ru zhal gdams rtsa gsum kun 'dus las/ bla sgrub kun 'dus rdo rje'i rgya mdud/* (38)
22. *bLa ma'i thugs sgrub 'chi med lcags kyi bum bzang las/ bsnyen bsgrub migs rim gu ru'i zhal lung 'od ze drwa ba/* (22)
23. *Gu ru'i zhal gdams rtsa gsum kun lus las/ tshe sgrub 'chi med lcags kyi bum bzang/* (47)
24. *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi bum bzang las/ sngon gtor dang gser skyems/* (1)
25. *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi bum bzang las/ tshe 'gu/* (5)
26. *Tshe sgrub 'chi med lcags kyi ri bo las/ bskang ba rin chen nor bu'i phreng ba/* (5)
27. *sKu gsum rang grol sgrub skor las/ bskang ba 'khor 'das rang grol/* (2)
28. *Tshe lā'i bum sgrub/* (2)
29. *rGyal sras zhal gdams rtsa gsum kun 'das las/ tshe 'gugs lcags ri rdo rje lcags kyu/* (6)
30. *Yang gsang sgrub skor rgyal ba rgya mtsho'i mdon rtogs 'og min them skas gsang chen 'dus pa'i thugs thig/* (17)
31. *Yang gsang sgrub skor rgyal ba rgya mtsho'i dbang mchog dri ma med pa 'og min them skas/* (9)
32. *Dag snang gsang mdzod gnyen po las/ nam snying gsang ba'i yang tig skor/* (1)
33. *gTer chen po'i zhabs brten mi shig rdo rje'i krhi chen/* (2)

VOLUME II:

The Volume II contains two separated groups of texts. They are both centred on Mañjuśrī ('Jam dpal dbyangs), and have two separate tables of contents.

The first reads: *'Jam dpal zhi drag gi chos tshan ji yod kyi dkar chag bzhugs so* (*A List of Number of Classes of Teachings on the Peaceful and Wrathful [Manifestations] of Mañjuśrī*).

1. *bLa ma'i thugs sgrub sku gsum rang grol las/ 'jam dpal zhi sgrub shes rab blo 'phel/* (6)
2. *'Jam dpal shes rab blo 'phel gyi brgyud pa'i gsol ba 'debs gzugs spob gter 'byen/* (1)
3. *'Jam dpal shes sgrub dbang bzhi ye shes rab 'bar/* (8)

4. *bLa ma'i thugs sgrub sku gsum rang grol las/ 'jam dpal drag sgrub rdo rje'i phub rdzong/* (25)

The second table of contents reads: *'Jam dpal zhi drag gyi dkar chag grin chen gyi phreng ba* (*A Precious Rosary: A List of Peaceful and Wrathful [Manifestations] of Mañjuśrī*).

KA *gSol 'deb sbyin rlabs thugs rje'i sprin phung/* (1)
KHA *'Jam dpal brgyud 'debs 'od sku bsgyur sgrub/* (1)
GA *Cho ga'i sngon 'gro rdo rje'i sgra dbyangs/* (4)
NGA *Byin 'bebs ye shes zla ba'i bdud rtsi/* (3)
CA *Yang gsang 'jam dpal zhi drag rgyun gyi nyams len khyer bde rang rig gsal ston/* (4)
CHA *'Jam dpal dbyangs rtsa sgrub ye shes thig le/* (10)
JA *'Jam dpal gzhon nu ye shes dpal 'bar/* (8)
NYA *'Jam dpal sgrub thabs thugs kyi thig le/* (15)
TA *Padma'i rigs mchog thugs kyi thig le/* (13)
THA *'Jam dpal rnon po'i sgrub thabs ye shes thig le/* (8)
DA *'Jam dpal rigs lnga'i zur rgyan rin chen drwa ba/* (18)
NA *Yang gsang rigs lnga'i bum dbang chig sbrel* (13)
PA *Yang gsang 'jam dpal zhi drag chig sbrel tshe 'gugs 'od zer drwa bar do rje'i lcags skyu/* (3)
PHA *Yang gsang 'jam dpal ye shes sems dpa' gshin rje ratna rtsal rdzogs kyi lus dkyil ye shes thig le/* (17)
BA *'Jam dpal drag sgrub rdo rje'i me char/* (76)
MA *Yang gsang 'jam dpal ye shes sems dpa' gshin rje'i gshed kyi tha ram 'dul sbyong drag po'i bzhed sgra/* (19)
TSA *'Jam dpal drag po ratna rtsal rdzogs kyi cha lags bsdu khang gshin rje dug phur nag po'i tsa kra/* (16)
TSHA *Yang gsang hūm gi thugs tig 'jam dpal zhi drag khog phub lag len gsal ba'i me long/* (18
DZA *Yang gsang hūm gi thugs tig 'jam dpal ye shes sems dpa' khog phub 'od zer drwa bad pal chen zhal lung/* (31)
WA *Yang gsang gshin rje'i khyung bzlog gnam lcags zhun thig/* (7)
ZHA *Yang gsang sgrub skor gtsang gi phris [= phrin las]/* (7)
ZA *rTsa gsum yongs kyi las sbrel ba'i drag sngags bla 'gugs dang rbad mnan la brten pa'i nyes byin rdo rje'i spu kri/* (1)
'A *'Jam dpal drag po'i 'od zer sgrub skabs thugs sgrub drag po'i gzir mda'/* (1)
YA *Thun gtor drag po'i thun gtor ye shes skar mda'/* (2)
RA *Yang gsang 'jam dpal khro bo'i dbang mchog gnam lcags zhun thig/* (27)
LA *Yang gsang 'jam dpal gshin rje'i bka' srung sgrub pa'i phrin bcol spu gri nag po 'phrul gyi glog zhabs/* (12)

<u>VOLUME III:</u>

Volume III contains a group of texts centred on rTa mgrin (Hayagrīva). The Volume also contains a list of the texts that reads: *Hūm chen kā ra'i thugs tig las/ rta mgrin rdo rje me char dkar chag*.

1. *rTa nag lha lnga'i brgyud 'debs rdo rje'i bzhed sgra dang padma'i bzhed sgra gnyis/* (3)
2. *brGyud 'debs bsdus pa/* (1)
3. *brGyud 'debs rdo rje'i tshangs dbyangs/* (2)
4. *rDo rje'i me char brgyud 'debs zur 'debs/* (3)
5. *gSang chu byin rlabs/* (2)
6. *Zur 'debs sngon 'gro dkar bgegs bcas/* (17)
7. *rTa mgrin rdo rje'i me char gyi las byang ye shes drwa ba/* (33)
8. *Tshe 'gugs dka' gter gnyis/* (8)
9. *Byin 'bebs rdo rje me char/* (9)
10. *sMan mchod/* (2)
11. *mDun bskyed srid gsum gting bzlog/* (79)
12. *sNgags dmigs/* (2)
13. *gDab phur/* (5)
14. *mDun bskyed khro bcu'i bzlog pa byang ma reg gcod/* (8)
15. *Khyung btsong/* (9)
16. *bZlog pa'i yams bsgyur/* (5)
17. *rTa mgrin gsang sgrub rdo rje'i gur chen/* (15)
18. *Tshogs mchod/* (12)
19. *bsKang ba rin chen phreng ba/* (15)
20. *gSang bdag/* (13)
21. *Phyag rdor bum sgrub/* (17)
22. *Khyung gi mngon rtogs/* (9)
23. *Khyung sgrub rdo rje'i bskyed zin/* (13)
24. *Khyung gi rjes gnang/* (13)
25. *Seng ha nā da'i sgrub thabs padma'i phreng ba/* (45)
26. *Seng ha nā da'i rgyun gyi rnal 'byor/* (5)
27. *Seng ha nā da'i tshogs mchod dngos bgrub rgya mtsho/* (9)
28. *bKra shis gter bum/* (11)
29. *Seng ha nā da'i sgrub thabs las tshogs lag len/* (9)
30. *kLu'i bum sgrub/* (11)
31. *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor gyi bla brgyud/* (2)
32. *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor/* (17)
33. *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor dbang chog/* (17)
34. *bCud len migs rim 'od zer drwa ba 'chi med srog sgrub/* (9)
35. *Nyi zla kha sbyor gyi cha lag rlung khrid tshe bcud kun 'dus/* (10)
36. *Zab gsang yang tig nyi zla kha sbyor las/ gab gsal lag len shel dkar me long /* (*gab gsal lag len*)/ (4)
37. *Tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor gyi sgo nas tshe bla bslu ba'i cho ka mchi bdag gtor bsgyur/* (30)
38. *Bla 'gugs/* (3)
39. *rTa mgrin mdun bskyed rim zhal shes/* (8)
40. *gSang sgrub bskyed rim gsang ba'i me long/* (10)
41. *'Go ba'i lha lnga'i bso mchod/* (9)
42. *Rig pa gnad sprod/* (11)
43. *sNying thig padma'i zhal lung rdzogs rim/* (7)

44. *rTa mgrin sngags 'bum/* (16)
45. *rDzas rgod zhal shes/* (9)
46. *rDzas rgod byin 'bebs/* (2)
47. *rTa mgrin rtags gdab/* (7)
48. *rTa mgrin yang gsang rdo rje'i me char gyi rtsol med gsang sngags myur lam* (9)
49. *Nyes 'byin/* (11)
50. *Don zab gnad smin shel dkar me long* (*sNga 'gyur*)*/* (14)
51. *'Gong par gtar/* (5)
52. *Dam sri glud gdos/* (17)
53. *rTa mgrin thugs tig/* (13)
54. *rTa nag gi dbang chog rdo rje'i go khrab/* (9)
55. *dBang chog dug lnga rang grol/* (22)
56. *rTa nag drag po'i me yi tha ram/* (6)

VOLUME IV:

Volume Four is entitled *sKu gsum sgrub skor gsang bdag bdud bshed drag po* and contains a table of contents, *sKu gsum sgrub skor gsang bsag bdud gshed kyi chos tshan ji yod kyi dkar chag bzhugs so*.

KA *Dus gsum sangs rgyas thams cad 'dus pa'i sku rig 'dzin yongs 'dus bdud kyi gshed chen gyi dkar chag gsar sgrigs rin chen phreng mdzas las sbyod bde kun gsal padma'i phreng ba bri pa la sku gsum sgrub skor o rgyan rnam thar las gsol 'debs bsdus pa rin chen phreng mdzas/* (6)
KHA *brGyud 'debs thog ma'i mgon po/* (2)
GA *bDud gshed drag po'i zur rgyan/* (32)
NGA *bDud gshes phrin las padma'i rol mtsho/* (50)
CA *Na sgrub rdo rje'i brag rdzogs/* (14)
CHA *gSang sgrub khro chu'i zhun thig/* (13)
JA *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs/* (9)
NYA *'Dul sbyong drag po/* (1)
TA *Drag sngags rtsa kra me yi 'khor lo/* (2)
THA *Thun gtor/* (2)
DA *mDun bskyed phur brtebs/* (2)
NA *Lo tri'i dmod pa sde brgyad las gtad/* (2)
PA *gShin rje dmod zlog byang ma rig gcod/* (2)
PHA *Thun sgrub drag po'i thog zor/* (1)
BA *mDun bskyed rdo rje'i thog mda'/* (124)
MA *rDo rje tshe rgyal sgrub thabs/* (15)
TSA *Ge sar sgo nas sba lcag bsgrub pa'i gter mdzod/* (8)
TSHA *gTer srung spong ra'i sgrub thabs dngos grub rgya mtsho/* (9)
DZA *bSang mchod 'dzam gling bde ston/* (42)
WA *Khu ye/* (4)
ZHA *bSang gi zhi ba bdud rtsi char 'bebs/* (7)
ZA *sKu gsum rig 'dzin 'dus pa las/ gzhig rten bkod pa bdag bcos thabs/* (17)
'A *Zhi nyung* (1)
YA *'Go ba'i lha lnga sol thabs/* (6)

RA *bDud gshed drag po'i tha ram/* (31)
LA *Nyes 'byin spu gri'i mnan chog/* (7)
SHA *bLa ma dpal chen he ru ka'i sgrub thabs gzi 'bar/* (24)

VOLUME V:

Volume Five, *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur chos skor*, contains a group of twenty-five texts centred on the *Vajrakilāya* (*rDo rje phur bu*).

1. *Yang gsang chig sbrel rdo rje'i me char las/ dpal chen rtsa sgrub ye shes thig le/* (39)
2. *dPal chen phur pa'i zur rgyan rab gsal/* (45)
3. *Yang gsang chig sbrel rdo rje phur pa las/ rgyan gyi rnal 'byor ye shes thig le/* (?)

Volume Five also contains a table of contents, *Yang gsang rta phur kā'i la ya'i chos tshan dkar chag shel dkar me long*.

KA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i/ rgyun gsang tig 'dzin pa'i gsol 'debs/* (7)
KHA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i/ rgyun gsang bla med lugs kyi gsol 'debs/* (1)
GA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i/ byin rlabs bcu gcig ye shes dpal 'bar/* (6)
NGA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i/ mngon rtogs khro chu'i zhun thig/* (30)
CA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i/ mngon rtogs bskyed rim rdo rje'i phur rdzong/* (54)
CHA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i/ nang sgrub in dra nī la'i do shal mi shig rdo rje'i go rdzong/* (17)
JA *Yang gsang snying thig [rta phur] kā'i la ya'i gsang sgrub rdo rje'i me char/* (15)
NYA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i rgyan gyi rnal 'byor byang chub sems gdams/* (12)
TA *Yang gsang rta phur kā'i la ya'i dzab bsnyen sbas don rab gsal rdo rje'i thog mda'/* (5)
THA *Yang gsang hūm gi sgrub skor las/ bsnyen sgrub las sbyor 'bad thabs/* (7)
DA *Yang gsang hūm gi thugs tig kā'i la ya'i dzab mchod byin rlabs sprin phung/* (1)
NA *Yang gsang rta phur kā'i la ya'i gter srung mchod thabs phrin las gleg zhabs/* (5)
PA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i tshogs mchod myong ba rang grol rdo rje'i zhun thig/* (15)
PHA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i bsakng bad pal chen dgyes pa'i bzhad sgra/* (6)
BA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i gter bzlog rdo rje'i bzhad sgra/* (59)
MA *Yang gsang sgrub skor rta phur kā'i la ya'i mdos bzlog lag len shel dkar me long/* (40)
TSA *Yang gsang sgrub skor rta phur kā'i la ya'i mdos bzlog dmag g.yul 'gyed srid gsum gting bzlog/* (32)
TSHA *Yang gsang rta phur nag po'i las tshogs dam glud gshed ma phyir bzlog/* (13)
DZA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i sku gsung thugs kyi bzlog 'khor byad ma cham 'bebs/* (4)

WA *Yang gsang snying thig rta phur kā'i la ya'i them med gnad kyi gdams zab bstan dgra ham 'bebs/* (22)

ZHA *Yang gsang sgrub skor kā'i la ya'i drag po me yi sbyor ba drag bgegs dpung 'joms/* (21)

ZA *Yang gsang sgrub skor rta phur kā'i la ya'i gshed 'dul 'khrul snang rang grol/* (51)

'A *Yang gsang sgrub skor haya gri wa kā'i la ya'i dbang chog in dra nī la'i cod pan/* (14)

YA *Yang gsang sgrub skor kā'i la ya'i lha dbang ye shes gzi 'bar rdo rje'i go khrag/* (31)

RA *Yang gsang snying thig kā'i la ya'i khog phub bdud las rnam rgyal dpal chen zhal lung/* (35)

VOLUME VI:

*Ma rgyud skor las / phag mo khros ma seng gdong lha mo bde chen rgyal mo sog gyi las mtha' yongs rdzogs bzhugs /*

1. *Ma rgyud brgyud 'debs /* (3)
2. *Dakki snying thig sbas rgya /* (33)
3. *bDe chen rgyal mo'i sun bzlog lag len /* (12)
4. *Sun bzlog tshogs mchod padma'i drwa ba /* (11)
5. *sNying thig dakki'i rgyun gsol sun bzlog /* (4)
6. *Phag mo'i phyi sgrub /* (11)
7. *Nang sgrub /* (7)
8. *Phag mo'i gsang sgrub /* (13)
9. *Tshogs mchod dngos sgrub rgya mtsho /* (7)
10. *'Da' ka ye shes myur lam /* (7)
11. *Phag mo'i rdzogs rim /* (30)
12. *Phag mo'i rlung khrid /* (18)
13. *Sems don nyams len /* (5)
14. *Seng gdong mngon rtog zur rgyan /* (8)
15. *Seng gdong dakki'i sgrub thabs /* (23)
16. *Seng gdong gtor zlog /* (32)
17. *Seng gdong bca' thabs /* (2)
18. *Byang khrol /* (8)
19. *bDud 'dul khros ma'i sngon ching /* (17)
20. *bDud 'dul khros ma'i sgrub thabs /* (20)
21. *Khros ma'i gsang sgrub /* (15)
22. *Yang gsang khros ma'i bka' srung gsol bsdus /* (9)
23. *Khros ma'i tshe 'gugs /* (7)
24. *mKha' 'gro'i spyi bshags /* (5)
25. *Khros ma'i gtor zlog gnam lcags 'khor lo /* (52)
26. *Khros ma'i rjes gnang /* (15)
27. *Khros ma'i lag len /* (10)
28. *Khros ma'i zur 'debs /* (9)
29. *Khros ma'i lam zab lta ba khrig chod /* (6)
30. *Tshogs mchod lag len shel dkar me long /* (9)
31. *mKha' 'gro'i tshogs mchod /* (48)

32. *Khros ma'i sbas rgya /* (4)
33. *Me mchod /* (7)
34. *Khros ma'i zur 'debs /* (9)
35. *Gri 'dul /* (57)
36. *Shing byang sogs kyi dpe'u ris /* (1)
37. *lHa mo'i sgrub thabs /* (11)
38. *lHa mo'i bstod bskul bka' yi rjes gnang /* (13)
39. *Ma mo'i yongs bsgyur gyi lag len /* (6)
40. *Ma mo'i yongs bsgyur /* (34)
41. *Khag 'dos /* (18)

VOLUME VII:

*sGrol ma gu drag sme brtsegs dzam dkar bka' srung bcas chos skor* contains a total of twenty-four texts.

1. *Yang gsang zab tig 'phags ma yid bzhin 'khor lam nyams len 'chi med bum bzang/* (9)
2. *Zab tig 'phags me'i rjes gnang/* (17)
3. *Pra sgrub gsang rgya'i zhal shes/* (10)
4. *rTa mgrin gsang ba'i yang tig las/ rnam mthong 'khrul kyi brta rgya/* (14)
5. *sNang srid yi lag len/* (5)
6. *sKu gsum rang grol sgrub skor gu drag ye shes rab 'bar las/ rdo rje'i me phreng can gyi sgrub thabs mdon bgegs tshad gcod/* (11)
7. *sKu gsum rang grol sgrub skor gu drag me phreng can gyi zur rgyan rdo rje'i bzhad sgra ye shes klogs 'khyil/* (7)
8. *Gu drag tshe 'gugs rdo rje'i lcags kyu/* (16)
9. *sKu gsum sgrub skor gu drag me phreng can gyi mdun bskyed dang sbrel ba'i bzlog pa gnam lcags 'khor lo khro chu thog 'bebs/* (32)
10. *Gu drag dbang chog/* (13)
11. *Chos dbyings nam mkha'i klong mdzod las/ sme brtsegs dpa' bo gcig pa'i rtsa sgrub/* (29)
12. *Khro rgyal sme ba brtsegs pa'i sbyong khrus/* (17)
13. *Chos dbyings nam mkha'i klong mdzod las/ sme brtsegs dpa' bo gcig pa'i sregs blug/* (8)
14. *Dzam dkar brgyud 'debs nor bu'i phreng ba/* (1)
15. *Dzam lha dkar po'i sgrub thabs/* (44)
16. *Dzam dkar bum sgrub/* (14)
17. *rGyud gsang gsol 'debs ka dag don rtogs/* (2)
18. *Drang srog loktri'i sgrub skor man ngag khol byung las/ sngon 'jug sbyi ching zur gsal shel dkar me long/* (8)
19. *Drang srong loktri'i sgrub skor man ngag khol byung las/ zhi drag chig sbrel gnam lcags thog mda'/* (13)
20. *Drang srong loktri'i sgrub thabs skor/ man ngag gsum brgya'i nang tshan las/ khol byung sbu gri reg bcod kyi/ byad zlog dus me'i 'khor lo/* (41)
21. *Drang srong loktri'i sgrub thabs skor/ man ngag gsum brgya'i nang tshan las/ las sbyor bram ze'i dmod zlog drag sngags 'khor lo/* (7)

22. *Drang srong loktri'i sgrub thabs skor/ man ngag gsum brgya'i nang tshan las/ gtad zlog lag len 'phrul gyi 'khor lo/* (7)
23. *Drang srong loktri'i sgrub thabs skor/ man ngag gsum brgya'i nang tshan las/ them med rno so man ngag thun sgrub drag po'i thog mda'/* (3)
24. *Drang srong loktri'i sgrub skor man ngag khol byung bka' rgya las/ gter srung gsol mchod phrin las myur 'grub bdud rtsi'i spyin phung/* (8)
25. *Drang srong loktri'i sgrub skor man ngag khol byung bka' rgya las tshe bcud ril bu'i dmigs rim 'od zer drwa ba/* (9)
26. *Drang srong loktri'i sgrub skor man ngag khol byung bka' rgya las/ byang chub sems kyi gdams pa kun bzang thugs thig/* (9)
27. *rTa mgrin gsang ba'i yang tig las/ seng ha na dā'i las tshogs skor/ mgon dkar yid bzhin nor bu yi/ sgrub pa zab mo'i lag len/* (9)
28. *sNgags kyi srung ma'i sgrub thabs/* (29)
29. *gZa' bdud dug gi spu gri/* (22)
30. *Dam can sgrub thabs nzhugs/* (14)
31. *Chos srung ma gzang dam gsum gyi bla rdo sgrub thabs rdo rje'i brtan phur/* (14)
32. *gTer srung gab rgya bkrol ba'i yi ge ithi/* (22)
33. *Ma hā kā la'i gsang sgrub snying thig/* (13)
34. *Ma hā kā la'i rgyan gsol/* (3)

VOLUME VIII:

1. *Ma hā kā la'i mchod phreng/* (26)
2. *Yang gsang sgrub skor rigs bdag snang ba mtha' yas kyi bka' srung gnod sbyin dzī na mi dra'i sgrubs [= sgrub] thabs/* (19)
3. *Chos skyong rnams kyi dbyangs bskul/* (3)
4. *Gu ru gsang ba'i bka' srung mchod thabs/* (4)
5. *Ma bza' dam gsum gyi mdun gzhi bskyed chog/* (3)
6. *Phrin las srid sgrol chen mo/* (4)
7. *bLa' srung ma bza' dam gsum/* (21)
8. *bKa' srung phrin bcol/* (10)
9. *bsTan srung rol pa mched bdun/* (9)
10. *Yang gsang sgrub skor bka' srung rnams kyi bskang bshags/* (7)
11. *gTer srung phrin bcol/* (7)
12. *Dug Phag nag po'i 'gyed/* (11)
13. *bsKul byang dug sbram thog 'beb/* (7)
14. *bZa' bskul dug mda' nag po/* (7)
15. *mGon po'i rgyun gsol phrin las glog zhang/* (1)
16. *lHa mo'i gsol mchod phrin las glog zhags/* (3)
17. *lHa mo'i phrin bcol rdo rje'i thog mda'/* (8)
18. *sNgags srung gsol mchod phrin las myur 'grub/* (1)
19. *bsTan srung 'gyel gdong nag po'i gsol mchod/* (3)
20. *gZa' gsol phrin las glog zhang/* (1)
21. *Dam can gsol mchod/* (2)
22. *Dam can gsol mchod/* (1)
23. *gNam sman ne ne'i gsol mchod/* (2)
24. *Kun mkhyil mchod gsum gsol mchod/* (1)

25. *Ma mgon gsol bsdus/* (1)
26. *lHa chen gsol mchod bsdus pa/* (3)
27. *Tshogs bdag gsol bsdus/* (2)
28. *lHa chen ma hā de wa'i gsol mchod/* (2)
29. *bDud rgyal gsol mchod/* (2)
30. *bKa' srung chos skyong rnams kyi gsol bsdus/* (3)
31. *Ge sar gsol mchod/* (2)
32. *rGyal po pe har gsol mchod rin chen nor phreng/* (2)
33. *rGyal po pe har gsol mchod/* (3)
34. *gNod sbyin tsi'u dmar po'i gsol mchod/* (1)
35. *rDo rje ngas nus ma'i gsol mchod/* (3)
36. *Dur khrod bdag po'i gsol mchod/* (5)
37. *Yang gsang dpal chen phur pa'i gsol mchod/* (6)
38. *rTa lha'i gsol mchod/* (2)
39. *gNyan thang lha'i gsol mchod mdor bsdus/* (5)
40. *gTer srung spom ri'i sgrub thabs/* (9)
41. *rDo rje rgyal mtshan gsol mchod/* (2)
42. *Brag dkar lha btsan/* (2)
43. *rDzin rgyal gsol mchod/* (2)
44. *bKa' srung dregs pa'i za ngu/* (4)
45. *Za ngu phrin bcol/* (2)
46. *sNgags srung ma'i nang bzlog/* (2)
47. *Thal brdeb/* (2)
48. *bZhes 'bed/* (3)
49. *rTa mgrin gsang ba'i yang tig las gter srung nā ga raksha gi gab rgya grol ba'i bka' gtad dug mda' nag po/* (8)

<u>VOLUME IX:</u>

1. *rGyud gsang gcug tor drag mo'i dgongs rgyan 'phyangs gi lag len rin chen drwa ba/* (18)
2. *rGyud gsang mchog du grub ma gtsug tor drag mo'i byad zlog me yi spu gri pha rol rgol 'joms/* (1)
3. *gTsug tor gdugs dkar sngon 'gro'i gtor ma 'bul ba/* (63)
4. *rGyud gsang gtsug tor drag mo'i sngon tor bde legs sphrin phung/* (2)
5. *rGyud gsang gtsug tor drag mo'i sngags drug phyag rgya'i byin rlabs/* (?)
6. *rGyud gsang mchog grab gtsug tor drag mo'i tsogs mchod mkha' 'gro dgyes pa'i dga' ston/* (13)
7. *Yang gsang sgrub skor jo mo bkra shis tshe ring ma'i rgyun gsol 'dod don kun 'grub bzhugs/*(2)[775]

[775] bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje revealed and composed this text at the rDza mer chen nunnery in August 2001.

# Appendix Four

## *A General Bibliography on the Treasure Tradition in non-Tibetan Languages*


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**Ye shes dpal 'byor, Sum pa mkhan po (1704-1788)**

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**Ratna gling pa, Rin chen dpal bzang po (1403-1479)**

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**O rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, rDza dpal sprul (1808-1887)**
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**O rgyan gling pa (thirteenth century)**
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| | 2005a. Shar mda’, Nang chen, Qinghai PRC. |
| | 2005b. Shar mda’, Nang chen, Qinghai PRC. |
| | 2005c. sKye rgu mdo/Yushu, Qinghai PRC |
| | 2006 sKye rgu mdo/Yushu, Qinghai PRC |
| dPal chen lha mo | 2005. sKye rgu mdo/Yushu, Qinghai PRC |
| bKra shis mtsho mo | 1998-1999. gNas chen padma mthong grol ri khrod, sKye rgu mdo, Qinghai, PRC |
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| dGe legs Rinpoche | 2005. Padma County, Qinghai PRC |
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| Chos bzang | 2000. dGa’ bde, mGo log, PRC |
| ’Jigs med rdo rje | 2000. dGa’ bde, mGo log, PRC |
| bsTan ‘dzin rgya mtsho | 2000. bLa rung lnga rig nang bstan slob gling, gSer thar, dKar rste, Sichuan PRC |
| bDud ’dul mgon po | 2000. sKye rgu mdo, Qinghai PRC |
| bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje | 1998-1999. gNas chen padma mthong grol ri khrod, sKye rgu mdo, Qinghai, PRC |
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| sPrul sku Tshe bzang | 1997-1998. Lhasa, TAR, PRC |
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# Summary

*Introduction*

This research suggests that in present-day eastern Tibetan regions of the People's Republic of China a number of Tibetan rNying ma leaders are employing charisma-based authority to promote the growth of rNying ma Buddhist centers of ritual and meditative instruction. In revitalizing traditional religious practices such as visionary and Treasure revelation activities, they are galvanizing some of the most significant religious movements in selected areas of Khams and mGo log in eastern Tibet.

In this dissertation I examine the Treasure revelation movement and, more specifically, I explore the role of some Treasure revealers in the religious world of today's Tibet. I focus on a case study of the life and activities of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje (b. 1921), who is a well-known Buddhist master, visionary, and Treasure revealer currently living in Shar mda' in Nang chen county in the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP).

*Research Questions*

Despite the fact that there have been a number of studies devoted to Buddhism in contemporary Tibet, no book-length investigation of the phenomenon of Treasure revelation in present-day Tibetan regions of the PRC has been published to date. This dissertation fills this lacuna in research on modern Tibet. Within that, the present study has two main aims. The first is to explore how currently active Treasure revealers have revived and reinvented their Treasure revelation practices in the face of major social and political changes that have taken place in the PRC. Through an analysis of contemporary Sino-Tibetan politics and the role of religion therein, this study answers the following questions: why and how have religion, and the Treasure revelation tradition in particular, enjoyed a resurgence under Chinese rule? What does the Treasure tradition offer today to Tibetans and an impressive number of ethnic Chinese as well?

The second aim of this work is to investigate the question of why and how do people become Treasure revealers in Tibet today? I will do this by focusing on the life and religious activities of one such contemporary Treasure revealer, gTer chen bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje. Years of fieldwork using participant observation methods living with bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje

and members of his community provide important data that help us understand the dynamics of these religious congregations and the roles they play in their teachers' revelations and doctrinal compositions.

*Outline of the Chapters*

In Chapter One, I open this study with an introduction to the major features of the Treasure tradition as it is represented in some popular Tibetan religious literary works on the subject. The chapter demonstrates a central thesis of this study: just as Treasure ideologies originally came into being as a response to religious and political pressures in eleventh-century Tibet, likewise in the present context some Tibetan religious leaders employ Treasure revelation as a successful means to respond to the political pressures of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Tibet under Chinese rule.

Chapter Two offers an overview of the social and political impact of decades of the Chinese government's religious policies in eastern Tibet. I argue that the Chinese government's political strategies relating to the large-scale economic development of the country as applied to Tibetan areas have caused a weakening of the religious authority of many monastic institutions by debilitating their economic power, incapacitating their political influence, limiting their educational authority, and perhaps most crucially diminishing their once large monastic population. After years of administrative control, the historical role of monasteries as exclusive guarantors of religious authority and scholastic legitimacy and as institutional centers of traditional instruction has drastically decreased. Nevertheless, a number of alternative forms of religious authority have emerged in eastern Tibet that reflect the often eclectic nature of the rNying ma community such as visionary activities, Treasure revelation, and the formation of large and innovative religious communities as centers of practice and cultural production.

Within this socio-religious background, Chapter Three claims that visionary revelations seem to be particularly effective means of reestablishing ritual authority, codifying new identities, and promoting ancient religious narratives. In this chapter, I discuss some of the features that characterize Treasure activities in modern Tibet through introducing a number of contemporary visionaries who mostly live and operate in northern and central areas of Khams. I explore the charismatic aspect of their leadership, the different facets of their revelations, the communities that surround them, and the appearance of several Websites dedicated to Buddhist

visionaries and Treasure revealers as a response to the increasing demand to propagate Buddhist teachings among the Han Chinese.

Chapter Four introduces the life of one such present-day Treasure revealer, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje through a study of his autobiography as well as years of interviews I conducted with him. Born in 1921 to a nomadic family in sKye rgu mdo county (Yushu TAP), bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje is a non-celibate Tantric practitioner who largely modeled himself on many Treasure revealers of the past, in particular his two major teachers Grub dbang bde chen rdo rje and Nyag bla byang chub rdo rje. By looking at bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s life we have the opportunity to explore in detail the paradigms that are enacted in the process of the recognition of a Treasure revealer.

Chapter Five opens with a description and analysis of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s collection of Treasure cycles and offers brief outlines and explanations of his writings. In this chapter I elaborate on some of the features of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s teachings by looking at his Treasure cycles. I argue that one of the central themes of his revelations is to provide legitimacy and status to the class of non-celibate Tantric professionals called the white-robed and matted-haired group (*gos dkar lcang lo’i sde*). Particularly important for this is the *rTsol med*, a Treasure teaching attributed to Padmasambhava that is an initiation ritual for Tantric adepts. Interestingly, this text lists a number of regalia (*rgyan*) that provide the adept with the appropriate signs of his rank. I argue that that this a ritual scripture is not only intended to provide legitimacy to the class of non-celibate adepts, but also attempts to provide a distinctive identity to the lineage initiated by bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje.

In conclusion, by exploring the life and activities of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje we can see that there is a great continuity between present-day Treasure revealers and those of the eleventh century. The essential ideals underlying the tradition are the same, namely, the retrieval of supposedly ancient manuscripts in a ritual context that can authenticate and at the same time legitimate contemporary religious practices and spiritual traditions. In the case of bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje, his involvement in the Treasure revelation tradition has enabled him to gain recognition and authority in the religious world and, therefore, to establish himself as a Buddhist teacher and to open hermitages and communities of monastics and non-celibates following his lineage. From his religious position, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje has been able to revive many previously forbidden practices belonging to Tibetan culture such as worshipping local deities,

performing ritual pilgrimage, constructing reliquary *stūpas*, practicing apotropaic rituals, and transmitting *gter ma* liturgical materials. Additionally, he acts as a spiritual guide for the laity thus reconnecting the people with aspects of their cultural patrimony. Therefore, bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje acts as a link between Tibet’s past and the current need to safeguard a Tibetan sense of religious identity. As such, he is an ideological force behind the contemporary renaissance of Buddhism in his land.

# Samenvatting

*Inleiding*

Dit onderzoek stelt dat in het oostelijk deel van Tibet in de Volksrepubliek China op dit moment verschillende Tibetaanse rNying ma leiders gebruik maken van charismatisch gezag om de groei te bevorderen van rNying ma boeddhistische instellingen voor het onderwijs in ritueel en meditatie. Door deze en andere traditionele religieuze praktijken, zoals visioenen of de openbaring van Schatten, nieuw leven in te blazen, leveren zij een belangrijke bijdrage tot de versterking van de hedendaagse boeddhistische geloofspraktijk in delen van Khams en mGo log in oostelijk Tibet. De openbaring van Schatten is een soort continue boeddhistische openbaring die zichzelf altijd presenteert als het gevolg van de religieuze activiteiten van de achtste eeuwse Indiase tantrische meester Padmasambhava, van wie wordt gezegd dat hij het Boeddhisme in Tibet heeft verspreid. Padmasambhava gaf een deel van de leer dat pas in de toekomst zou moeten worden openbaard mee aan de incarnaties van zijn 25 leerlingen. Pas wanneer de juiste voorspoedige omstandigheden aanwezig zijn, kunnen deze Schatten in de vorm van voorwerpen of teksten worden ontdekt of in visioenen worden geopenbaard.

In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik de tradities rond de openbaring van Schatten en meer in het bijzonder de rol van enkele openbaarders van Schatten in de religieuze wereld van het hedendaagse Tibet. Dit onderzoeksproject doet dat onder meer door een case study van het leven en werk van bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje (1921- ). Dit is een bekende boeddhistische meester die talloze visioenen heeft gehad en Schatten heeft geopenbaard, en tegenwoordig leeft in Shar mda’ in het Nang chen district in dh Yushu Tibetaanse Autonome Prefectuur (TAP).

*Onderzoeksvragen*

Ondanks het feit dat er allerlei studies zijn gewijd aan het boeddhisme in het hedendaagse Tibet en enkele daarvan zich specifiek richten op het openbaren van Schatten, bestaat er nog geen monografie die volledig is gewijd aan dit fenomeen in de Tibetaanse gebieden van de Volksrepubliek China heden ten dage. Deze dissertatie heeft daarom twee doelstellingen.

Enerzijds beschrijf ik de traditie zelf en laat ik zien hoe openbaarders van Schatten die nu actief zijn hun praktijk van het openbaren van Schatten opnieuw uitvinden, tegen de achtergrond van de grote sociale en politieke veranderingen die in de Volksrepubliek China en Tibet zelf plaatsvinden. Een cruciaal aspect van dit onderzoek bestaat uit de hedendaagse Sino-Tibetaanse politiek en de rol van religie daarin. Hoe en waarom heeft religie, en in het bijzonder de traditie van de openbaring van Schatten, tijdens het Chinese bewind een herleving heeft kunnen doormaken? Wat voor religieuze mogelijkheden biedt de traditie van de openbaring van Schatten aan de hedendaagse Tibetanen, maar ook aan een groeiend aantal etnische Chinezen?

Anderzijds onderzoek ik het leven van gTer chen bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s door middel van zijn autobiografie en zijn religieuze activiteiten. De hoofdvraag die ik tracht te beantwoorden hoe en waarom mensen in Tibet openbaarders van Schatten worden.

*Samenvatting van de hoofdstukken*

Hoofdstuk Een geeft een inleiding in de belangrijkste kenmerken van de traditie van Schatten zoals wij die terugvinden in enkele populaire Tibetaanse religieus-literaire werken over dit onderwerp. Mijn doel is hier om een belangrijke these van deze studie te illustreren, namelijk hoe net zoals de ideologie van de Schatten ooit ontstond als antwoord op religieuze en politieke druk in het tiende eeuwse Tibet, enkele Tibetaanse religieuze leiders tegenwoordig de openbaring van Schatten (*gter ma*) opnieuw gebruiken als een effectieve methode om te reageren op de politieke druk in Tibet onder Chinees bestuur in de late 20$^{e}$ en 21$^{e}$ eeuw.

Hoofdstuk Twee biedt een overzicht van de sociale en politieke impact van decennia van religieus beleid door de Chinese overheid in oostelijk Tibet. Ik betoog dat het beleid van de Chinese overheid in de diverse Tibetaanse gebieden als gevolg van de grootschalige economische ontsluiting die op dit moment plaatsvindt heeft geleid tot een cruciale verzwakking van het religieuze gezag van talloze kloosters door het afbreken van hun economische macht, het verminderen van hun politieke invloed, het inperken van hun gezag op het gebied van onderwijs, en het verminderen van het grote aantal monniken in kloosters, die ooit een van de belangrijkste instrumenten van de macht van de kloosters waren. Tegelijkertijd is een aantal alternatieve vormen van religieus gezag opnieuw opgekomen in oostelijk Tibet, die vaak het eclectische

karakter van de rNying ma traditie benadrukken, zoals visionaire activiteiten, de openbaring van Schatten, en het vormen van grote innovatieve religieuze gemeenschappen als centra van religieuze beoefening en culturele reproductie.

Hoofdstuk Drie stelt dat openbaringen die gebruik maken van visioenen buitengewoon geschikt zijn om opnieuw een religieus discours op te bouwen met betrekking tot ritueel gezag, de codificatie van nieuwe identiteiten, en het promoten van oude religieuze vormen en verhalen. Tibetaanse religieuze professionals zoals openbaarders van Schatten (*gter ston*) en niet-celibataire tantrische beoefenaren (*sngags pa*) worden steeds zichtbaarder in het religieuze en sociale landschap van Tibet. De openbaringen, vaak zeer publieke gebeurtenissen, spelen een belangrijke rol in het stimuleren van geloof en het voeden van hoop bij de aanhangers, en dragen bij tot het behoud en de voortzetting van de traditionele overdracht van de boeddhistische leer en meditatie praktijken. In dit hoofdstuk bespreek ik in detail enkele van de kenmerken van activiteiten rond de openbaring van Schatten in het hedendaagse Tibet door het bespreken van hedendaagse visionairen die voornamelijk leven en werken in de noordelijke en centrale gebieden van Khams. Ik onderzoek de charismatische dimensie van hun leiderschap, de verschillende aspecten van hun openbaringen, de gemeenschappen om hen heen, en het verschijnen van enkele websites gewijd aan boeddhistische visionairen en openbaarders van Schatten in antwoord op de toenemende vraag naar de boeddhistische leer onder Han-Chinezen.

Hoofdstuk Vier introduceert het leven en de religieuze ervaringen van zo'n nog levende openbaarder van Schatten, bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, geboren in 1921 in een nomadische familie in het sKye rgu mdo district (Yushu TAP). Zijn vroege leven en zijn ecstatische ervaringen geassocieerd met Padmasambhava zijn later geïnterpreteerd als tekenen van een specifiek voorspoedige associatie met een ver Tibetaans verleden. Zijn autobiografische geschriften staan vol met de exemplarische daden van een toegewijde beoefenaar en leggen getuigenis af van de betrokkenheid van een boeddhistische meester. Door te kijken naar het leven van bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje kunnen wij een beter inzicht verwerven in de paradigma's die tot leven komen in het proces van erkenning van een openbaarder van Schatten.

Hoofdstuk Vijf opent met een beschrijving en analyse van de diverse cyclussen van de verzameling van Schatten door bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje's en biedt korte samenvattingen en verklaringen van zijn geschriften. Behalve een verzameling openbaringen zijn er onder de manuscripten van bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje ook andere teksten die inzicht verschaffen in zijn identiteit als openbaarder van Schatten en het belang dat hij aan zijn ontdekkingen hechtte. In dit

hoofdstuk ga ik nader in op enkele aspecten van bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje’s Schatten en leringen door nader te kijken naar zijn cyclussen van Schatten. Ik betoog dat één van de centrale thema’s van zijn openbaringen is om legitimiteit en aanzien te verschaffen aan een specifieke groep niet-celibataire tantrische professionals. In dat opzicht is de *rTsol med* bij uitstek interessant, een openbaring in de vorm van een Schat toegeschreven aan Padmasambhava die een initiatie ritueel geeft voor tantrische beoefenaren. Ik betoog dat deze rituele tekst niet alleen bedoeld is om legitimiteit te verschaffen aan deze groep niet-celibataire beoefenaren, maar ook een duidelijkere identiteit moet geven aan de religieuze afstammingslijn die is begonnen door bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje. In het laatste deel van dit hoofdstuk analyseer ik ook de maatschappelijke rol van bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje binnen zijn gemeenschap, door een beschrijving van de manier waarop hij zichzelf niet alleen als een openbaarder van Schatten presenteert, maar ook als een voorspeller van de toekomst en een genezer.

# CURRICULUM VITAE

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## CURRENT ACADEMIC EMPLOYEMENT

**Northwestern University, Evanston, IL**
Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies
September 2009-Present

## EDUCATION

**Leiden University, Faculty of Humanities (Leiden, The Netherlands)**
*Candidate for Doctor of Philosophy*, (defense scheduled for February 2, 2010).
Dissertation title: *Bya rog prog zhu, The Raven Crest. The Life and Teachings of gTer chen bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, Treasure Revealer of Contemporary Tibet.*
Promotor: Professor dr. Barend J. ter Haar
Copromotor: Dr. Peter C. Verhagen
External Reviewers: Prof. dr. Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg (Leiden University, NL)
Prof. dr. B.C.A. Walraven (Leiden University, NL)
Dr. Andrew M. Fischer (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, NL)
Dr. Robert Mayer (Oxford University, UK)

**Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli, Italy Faculty of Humanities, Department of Asian Studies.**
*Masters of Arts May 1997, Laurea cum laude*
Major in Tibetan Language, Literature and Buddhist Studies and Chinese Language and Literature. Minor in Japanese Language and Literature.
Courses and exams included Chinese Philology, Asian and East Asian Religions and Philosophy, Anthropology.
Master's thesis focused on a study of Tibetan Buddhist oracle tradition. MA dissertation title: *gNas chung: L'Oracolo di Stato Tibetano* (*gNas chung: The Sate Oracle of Tibet* )
Supervisor: Prof. Ramon N. Prats

## STUDY ABROAD

**Tibet University, Lhasa, TAR, People's Republic of China**
*Completed two long-terms in Tibetan Language and Culture Studies, July 1997-January 1999*
Course work included both foreign students' classes in Tibetan language grammar, reading comprehension, general culture, calligraphy, and Tibetan students' classes in Buddhist epistemology and debate, History, and Genres of Tibetan Buddhist Literature. All classes were taught in colloquial Tibetan.

**Beijing Language and Culture University (*Beijing yuyuan wenhua daxue*), Beijing, People's Republic of China, International Students' Department**.
*Completed two long-terms in Chinese Language and Culture Studies, February 1996-July 1997*

Course work included colloquial Putonghua Chinese, literary Chinese, Newspaper Chinese readings, composition, and readings in contemporary Chinese literature.
Program grant offered by the *Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*.

**Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INaLCO), Paris, France**
*Completed one year of Tibetan Studies January 1995-December 1995*
Course work included colloquial and literary Tibetan, poetry (Prof. Sangda Dorje), and Buddhism
Advisor: Prof. Heather Stoddard.
Funded by the ERASMUS scholarship of the Erasmus/Socrates Program of the European Union.

**École Pratique des Hautes Études (ÉPHÉ) of Université Paris Sorbonne - Paris IV (Sorbonne University), Paris, France**
*Completed one year of Tibetan Studies January 1995-December 1995*
Course work included History of Tibetan Medical Tradition (Prof. Fernand Meyer), Ancient History of Tibet (Prof. Spanien-Macdonald) and Readings of Tibetan Tantric Material (Prof. Anne-Marie Blondeau)
Advisor: Prof. Anne-Marie Blondeau
Scholarship offered by the ERASMUS program of the European Students' Network.

**Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA), Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India**
*Completed twenty months of Tibetan Language and Buddhist Studies August 1992-May 1994*
Course work included colloquial and literary Tibetan, Buddhist terminology, Buddhist philosophy (all taught in colloquial Tibetan)

**Beijing Institute of Economics (Beijing jingji xueyuan), Beijing, People's Republic of China**,
*Completed three months of Chinese Economic Language Studies May1993-July 1993*
Course work included colloquial Chinese, Chinese Economics, and Chinese economic terminology.

**Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, People's Republic of China**
**International Students' Department**
*Completed six months of colloquial and literary Chinese Studies June 1990-December 1990*
Course work included colloquial and literary Chinese, reading comprehension, composition, and Chinese calligraphy

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## ACADEMIC AWARDS, GRANTS, and FELLOWSHIPS

- **Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York, NY, USA**, Shelley and Donald Rubin Resident Scholar, 2008-2009.
- **CNAS** (Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies), Research Fellowship, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal. Textual research on 'Ja' tshon snying po (1585-1656)'s legacy in the Himalayas, titled: "Trans-boundary Lineages: A Study of Tibetan Buddhist Practices in Northern Nepal". October 2005 – October 2006
- **Research School CNWS** (Centre for Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, Leiden) Research Assistant (AIO) Grant for Ph.D./Doctoral dissertation, 1999-2003
- **British Council**, First Certificate in English, Napoli 1997
- **Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** Award Scholarship in Chinese Studies for one year-term at the Beijing Language and Culture University, 1996-1997
- **ERASMUS** scholarship of the Erasmus/Socrates Program of the European Union for a one year term in Tibetan Studies at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INaLCO) and École Pratique des Hautes Études (ÉPHÉ) in Paris, 1995

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## UNIVERSITY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- **MODERN STANDARD TIBETAN**

- *Introduction to Tibetan Language*, Spring 2008. Part-Time Faculty, **Department of Religion, Eugene Lang College of the The New School, New York City, NY**

- *Instructor of Spoken Tibetan (Lhasa Dialect) for Undergraduate Students. January-May 2001.*Organized the course, provided textbooks, and graded exams

- *Instructor of Spoken Tibetan (Lhasa Dialect) for Undergraduate Students. January-May 2000.* Organized the course, provided textbooks, and graded exams

- **OTHER LANGUAGES**

  - *Instructor* of *Italian Language*, Academic year 1996-1997. **Predeparture Training Department BLCU (The Foreign Language Language Training Center BLCU). Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, People's Republic of China**

- **ASIAN RELIGIONS**

  - **Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Program, Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL**
    Visiting Assistant Professor, *Himalayan Cultures*, Winter 2009.

  - **Department of Religious Studies, Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL**
    Visiting Assistant Professor, *Topics in Asian Religions* - "Religions of Tibet," Winter 2009.
    Visiting Assistant Professor, *Introduction to Hinduism* Spring 2010.

  - **Department of Religion, Eugene Lang College of the The New School, New York City, NY**
    Part-Time Faculty, *The Shaman and the Buddha: Ecstatic Practices in Buddhist Societies*, Fall 2008.
    Part-Time Faculty, *Buddhism and Politics in the Modern Era: Buddhist Militants, Militant Buddhists*, Spring 2009.
    Part-Time Faculty, *Cultures of the Himalayas*, Spring 2008.

  - **Department of Religion, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ**
    Part-Time Lecturer, *Tibetan Religions*. Fall 2007-Spring 2008
    Part-Time Lecturer, *Buddhism*, Spring 2008.

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**PUBLICATIONS**

- and Sarah Jacoby (eds). *Buddhism beyond the Monastery: Tantric Practices and their Performers in Tibet and the Himalayas. Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Oxford 2003*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

- "Householders and Monks: A Study of Treasure Revealers and their Role in Religious Revival in Contemporary Eastern Tibet." In Sarah Jacoby and Antonio Terrone (eds), *Buddhism beyond the Monastery: Tantric Practices and their Performers in Tibet and the Himalayas. Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Oxford 2003*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp. 73-109.

- "Tibetan Buddhism Beyond the Monastery: Revelation and Identity in rNying ma Communities of Present-day Kham". In Monica Esposito (ed.), *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Paris, École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), Coll. «Études thématiques» (22.2), 2008, pp. 746-779.

- "Visions, Arcane Claims, and Hidden Treasures: Charisma and Authority in a Present-Day Gter ston." In C. Klieger (ed.), *Tibet, Self, and the Tibetan Diaspora: Voices of Difference. Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the IATS, 2000*, Leiden: Brill 2002, pp. 213-228.

- "Living on the Peaks: Encounters with Tibetan Visionaries." *CNWS Newsletter*, 23/2003, pp. 24-27.

- "The Tibetan Terma Tradition." *The Center for Buddhist Studies Weblog*, at http://www.cbs.columbia.edu/weblog/2007/01/the_tibetan_ter.html. 11 January 2007. Also China Tibet Information Network at http://info.tibet.cn/en/culture/kig/t20070403_224284.htm

- "'*Anything Can Be an Appropriate Treasure Teaching*!' Authentic Treasure Revealers and the Moral Implications of Noncelibate Tantric Practice." In Peter Schwieger and Saadet Arslan (eds), *Tibetan Studies: An Anthology. Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, 2006*, Halle: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2009, pp. 397-426 (In Press).

- "Cyberspace Revelations: Tibetan Treasures, Information Technology, and the Transnational Imagined Reader". In Anne Chayet, Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, Françoise Robin, Jean-Luc Achard (eds.), *Edition, éditions: l'écrit au Tibet, évolution et devenir / Publishing and Editing: the Evolution and Future of Writing in Tibet*, "Collectanea Himalayica," Vol. 3, 2009 (In Press).

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**BOOK REVIEWS**

- "Is Tibet (Really) Chinese". A review of *Le Tibet est-il Chinois? Réponses à cent questions chinoise.* Anne-Marie Blondeau et Katia Buffetrille (eds.) Paris: Albin Michel (2002), 468 pp. In *IIAS Newsletter*, n. 31 July, 2003, p. 39.

- "A Cutting-Edge Manual for Spoken Tibetan". A review of *Manuel de Tibétain Standard: langue et civilization (+ 2 CDs)*, 1998. Nicolas Tournadre and Sangda Dorje. Paris: L'Asiathèque. In *IIAS Newsletter*, n. 29, November, 2002: 39.

- Review of *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places in Tibetan Culture: A Collection of Essays*. 1999. Toni Huber (ed.) Dharamsala: Library of the Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA). In *The Tibet Journal*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 & 4, Autumn & Winter, 2001: 231-32.

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**WORKS IN PROGRESS**

- (ed.) *Tibetan Visionaries and Their Revelations: Studies on gter stons and their gter mas.* To be published as a volume in the *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* (*JIATS*). Publication expected in 2010.

- "gTer chen bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje and the *gter ma* Tradition in Contemporary Tibet". In Antonio Terrone (ed.) *Tibetan Visionaries and Their Revelations: Studies on gter stons and their gter mas*. *JIATS*. Publication expected in 2010.

- "Tibetan Treasure Tradition: Soundings in the Field and Its History." In Antonio Terrone (ed.) *Tibetan Visionaries and Their Revelations: Studies on gter stons and their gter mas*. *JIATS*. Publication expected in 2010.

- *Contemplation as Food and Fog as Clothing: Revealing and Practicing Buddhism in Twenty first-Century Tibet.* (Scholarly book in preparation)

.

- "Rationalizing Ritual: The Mahāyoga Class in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*." (In preparation)

- "Trans-boundary Lineages: A Study of Tibetan Buddhist Practices in Northern Nepal associated with the Revelations of 'Ja' tshon snying po (1585-1656)" (In preparation)

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**CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

- "Buddhist Teachings from the Cyberspace: Reflections on the Internet Technology and the Apparitions of Tibetan Visionaries' Websites in China." Paper read at the American Academy of Religion, Montréal, Canada, 7-11 November 2009.

- "The Hook of Compassion: A "Moment of Death" Ritual in the Tibetan Buddhist Revelation Tradition." Paper read at *Buddhists at the End of Life*, University of California in Santa Cruz, May 1-3, 2009.

- "Cyberspace Revelations: Tibetan Treasures, Information Technology, and the Transnational Imagined Reader". Paper read at *Edition, éditions: l'écrit au Tibet, évolution et devenir / Publishing and Editing: the Evolution and Future of Writing in Tibet*, Paris 29-31 May 2008.

- "Finding Buddhism in the Twenty-First Century: Treasure Revelation and Religious Authority in Present-day Tibet" AAR, San Diego, CA. 16-20 Nov. 2007.

- "The New Chinese Journey to the West: The Influence of Chinese Buddhist Devotees in the Development of Tibetan Buddhism" AAR, San Diego, CA. 16-20 Nov. 2007.

- "*Anything is an Appropriate Treasure Teaching!*: Authentic Treasure Revealers and the Moral Implications of Noncelibate Tantric Practices". *The Eleventh Seminar of the IATS*, Königswinter, Germany, 26 August – 2 September, 2006.

- "Rebuilding Buddhist Institutions in Tibet." *Buddhist and Daoist Practice in the People's Republic of China,* a workshop organized by the "Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religion or Belief," Oslo, Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, September 15-16, 2005

- "Remembering the Past to Benefit the Present: Religious Expression in Today's Tibet". *Jornades Sobra El Tibet*, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain. March 10-11, 2004.

- "Householders and Monks: A Study of Treasure Discoverers in Contemporary Kham". *Tenth Seminar of the IATS*, Oxford, UK, September 6-10, 2003.

- "A Chos mKhan po: the Monk and the Visionary." *2001 Beijing Seminar on Tibetan Studies*, Beijing, PRC, July 24-28, 2001.

- "Identity and Self-Representation in Treasure Movements of Contemporary Tibet." *XXVIII Deutscher Orientalistentag*, Bamberg, Germany, March 26-30, 2001.

- "Visions, Arcane Claims, and Hidden Treasures: Charisma and Authority in a Present-Day *Gter ston*." *The Ninth Seminar of the IATS*, Leiden, the Netherlands, June 24-30, 2000.

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**GUEST LECTURES**

- "Treasure Revealers, the Internet, and the Digitalization of Buddhist Scriptures: An overview of a Global Phenomenon." Numata Lecture Series, University of Toronto (CA), Department of Religion, March 5-6, 2009.

- “bDe chen ’od gsal rdo rje and Treasure revelation in Contemporary Khams”. Guest lecture at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC) at the Rubin Museum of Art, New York, USA, December 3, 2008.

- “Buddhist Practice in Present-day Tibet: The Case of Treasure Discoverers (*gter ston*) in Khams”. Guest lecture at the Institute of Asian and African Studies (IAAS) of the University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland. April 26, 2004. Funded by the IAAS.

- “Treasure Movements in Contemporary Tibet”. Research School CNWS Center for African, Asian and Amerindian Studies, October 8, 1999.

- “Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Tibet”. Leiden University, The Netherlands, May 7, 1999.

## PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

- Tibetan Culture Adviser and Tibetan/Chinese/English/Italian Interpreter at “Meetings with Tibetan Civil Society” a mission to China and Tibet by the Economic and Social Commision of the Eueopean Union, Beijing and Lhasa, September 10-16 2009.

- “Tibetan Culture in the Diaspora,” organizer and leader of a Summer Study Program in Dharamsala (HP), India. Eugene Lang College of the New School for Liberal Arts in New York City.

- Shelly and Donald Rubin Resident Scholar at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City. Academic Year 2008-2009.

- “Revealed Buddhism: Studies in gTer ma (Treasures) and Their Revealers”. Organized and chaired Panel for the *Eleventh Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, Königswinter, Germany, August-September 2006.

- Organizer of CNWS Guest Lecture given by Prof. Ramon N. Prats d’Alos Moner “The Dream of Dreams: A New Focus on the Tibetan Book of the Dead”, Leiden, November 21, 2002.

- *Book of Abstracts of the Ninth Seminar of the IATS*. Leiden: IIAS, 2000. Translation and Edition of Tibetan and Chinese language abstracts.

- Organizer of the symposium “The Status of Tibet in the People’s Republic of China”. Istituto Universitario Orientale of the Universita’ degli Studi di Napoli. November 17, 1994.

## FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

- **Khumbu** (Northern Nepal) **10-22 October 2006**
  Namche Bazaar, Thangboche Monastery, and Thang smad Monastery. Fieldtrip for a research in progress for the Centre of Nepal and Asian Studies of Tribhuvan University.
  Advisor: Prof. Nirmal Thuladar.

- **Nepal** (Kathmandu). I have recently spent a total of two years (**October 2004-October 2006**) based in Kathmandu where I have conducted both anthropological and textual Buddhist studies. One year of this time I have been associated to the CNAS of Tribhuvan University as Research Fellow.
  Advisor: Prof. Nirmal Thuladar.

- **Eastern Tibet** (Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces of the PRC)

- Shar mda’ (Nang Chen, Yushu TAP), **September 2009**.
- mGo log, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu), and Shar mda’ (Nang chen) in Khams
  (Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces of the PRC)
  **July-August 2007**
- mGo log, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu) and Shar mda’ (Nang chen) in Khams.
  (Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces of the PRC)
  **June-August 2006**
- dKar mdzes, sDe dge, gSer rta, Padma, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu), Shar mda’ (Nang chen), Lhasa.
  (Qinghai, Sichuan, and TAR Provinces of the PRC)
  **November 2005-January 2006**
- mGo log, sKye dgu mdo (Yushu), and Shar mda’ (Nang chen) in Khams
  (Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces of the PRC)
  **May-July 2005**
- dKar mdzes, sDe dge, Lhasa.
  (Sichuan and TAR Provinces of the PRC)
  **October-December 2004**
- sKye rgu mdo (Yushu), Shar mda’ (Nang chen), and Beijing.
  (Qinghai Province of the PRC)
  **July-September 2004**
- sKye rgu mdo (Yushu), Shar mda’ (Nang chen)
  (Qinghai Province of the PRC)
  **June-September 2002**
- sKye rgu mdo (Yushu), Shar mda’ (Nang chen), and Beijing.
  (Qinghai Province of the PRC)
  Funded by the CNWS/Leiden University.
  **August-September 2001**
- sKye rgu mdo (Yushu), Shar mda’ (Nang chen), and Beijing.
  Eastern Tibet (Qinghai Province of the PRC) and Nepal (Kathmandu)
  Funded by the CNWS/Leiden University.
  **July 2000-January 2001**
- sKye rgu mdo (Yushu), Shar mda’ (Nang chen), Xining and Beijing.
  (Qinghai Province of the PRC)
  **June-September 1999**
- Lhasa, sKye rgu mdo (Yushu), Shar mda’ (Nang chen), Riwoche, Xining.
  (Qinghai and Lhasa Provinces of the PRC)
  **June-September 1998**

- **Lhasa** (Tibet University). During an overall period of eighteen months (**July 1997-January 1999**) spent at the University I have also conducted research in the field of modern and contemporary literature of Tibet using both Chinese and Tibetan sources for a history of modern Tibetan literature in the TAR and focusing on the translation of some short stories of Tshe ring gnam mgon (see Works in Progress).

- **Taiwan, Republic of China** (Taoyuan and Taibei)
  **November 2002**

- **Dharamsala, India** (Himachal Pradesh)
  **April-May 2001**

- **Dharamsala, India** (Himachal Pradesh). During an overall period of twenty months (**August 1992-May 1994)** spent in Dharamsala completing a long term of Tibetan language and culture studies I conducted several months of ethnographic and Buddhist textual research on Tibetan oracles and spirit-mediums and specifically on the current medium of the gNas chung Oracle at the gNas chung monastery in Gangchen Kyishong, seat of the Tibetan Government in Exile.

- **Lhasa** (Tibetan Autonomous Region) gNas chung monastery
  **June 1993**

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**MEMBERSHIP IN ACADEMIC SOCIETIES**

International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS)
American Academy of Religion (AAR)